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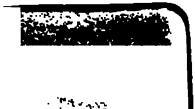
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JULIET'S
GUARDIAN.

MRS H. LOVETT CAMERON.



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JULIET'S GUARDIAN

A NOVEL

BY

MRS H. LOVETT CAMERON



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JULIET'S GUARDIAN.

CHAPTER I.

ERNESTINE'S REVENGE.

‘BUT, Madame !’

‘It is no use your saying any more, Ernestine. I tell you I have quite made up my mind ; here is your month’s wages, and you can have the cart to take your box to the station to meet the four o’clock train.’

‘But, Madame, to send me away like this after so many years ! it is unjust, it is *infâme* !’ stammered poor Ernestine, almost in tears. It was in Mrs. Blair’s little

morning-room, after breakfast, that this conversation took place.

‘Have you no fault to find with me, Madame, and yet to send me away like this?’

‘Yes, Ernestine; it is because Mr. Lamplough says you are impertinent to him——’

‘Aha! so it is ce gros Monsieur who does this for me!’

‘That is not the way to speak,’ answered her mistress angrily. ‘I desire that Mr. Lamplough shall be spoken of with the greatest respect in this house—and, my good girl, I will give you a first rate character; you will easily get another place.’

‘It is not that, Madame,’ answered Ernestine indignantly; ‘certainment, that I shall get another place, I am not at all afraid; but it is the cruelty of Madame to

send me away like this after that I have served her for seven years, and done so many things for her which no one else could do ; it is Madame who will suffer, not myself.'

'Very true, Ernestine,' almost whimpered Mrs. Blair, 'I don't know how I shall manage without you. But I can't help myself.' Do go, like a good girl, without a fuss.'

'Is Madame then determined to sacrifice me, an old servant, an old friend like me, to Monsieur—Monsieur Lamplou ?'

'I *must* send you away, Ernestine—don't look so savagely at me—' For Ernestine, whose southern blood was well up, stood looking almost menacingly at her mistress. 'Here, go upstairs and get that black silk dress with the bugle trimmings I had last winter. I will give it you, Ernestine ; and

'or goodness' sake let us part friends,' added Mrs. Blair almost imploringly.

' Bah ! ' exclaimed the girl, with a little snorting laugh of contempt, ' what do I want with your old black silk dress that is all frayed at the flounces, and worn to holes at the sleeves; keep your dress, Madame—je m'en fiche bien ! and I go, Madame, as you order me; but remember,' she added, turning round at the door and looking back at her warningly, ' remember that you will be very sorry for this; you will perhaps wish, some day, you had not turned Ernestine out of the doors like a chien ! '

' Most impertinent ! ' exclaimed Mrs. Blair, rising from her chair, trembling with passion; but Ernestine had already left the room.

With a beating heart the girl ran along the passage. She had talked lightly but the

day before, it is true, of leaving Mrs. Blair's service, but it was a very different thing to be thus turned away at a moment's notice from the house which had been to her a very comfortable home for so many years. And then Ernestine had always thought that Mrs. Blair would do something substantial for her when she left—give her a sum of money sufficient to enable her to start a shop, or to buy the goodwill of some dress-maker's business. Nor had her expectations been altogether unreasonable.

During the course of her seven years' service, Ernestine had done many things for her mistress which did not come strictly within the duties of a lady's maid.

There was that little incident of the letter, for instance; and there had been many little watchings and spyings, and faithful reportings of overheard conversations; in

all of which transactions Ernestine had staunchly adopted Mrs. Blair's interests as her own, and had carried through the little intrigues demanded of her with the utmost discretion and with a secrecy which, considering her sex and her class, was perfectly miraculous.

Mrs. Blair had frequently hinted to her that some reward for these many faithful and valuable services would one day be in store for her.

'When you want to marry or to settle down in life, Ernestine, you will find that I shall be your friend,' she had said more than once to her: thereby raising many hopes in her attendant's bosom—hopes which had now been so cruelly and ruthlessly blighted.

Running along the passage, she all but tumbled into the devoted James's outstretched arms.

‘ Whither away?’ said that gentleman poetically—quoting from the last number of the penny journal which he had just been studying.

‘ Ah, do not stop me, Monsieur Jams ! I must go and pack my boxes.’

‘ Pack ! why, who’s a-going away ?’

‘ It is I myself !’ cried Ernestine, pointing tragically to her chest. ‘ I go—I am sent away this very day—I know not where I shall repose myself this night ! Alas, my poor Jams ; you may well look au désespoir, for here you see a terrible instance of the ungratefulness of those we serve. Madame has sent me away !’

‘ Sent you away, Mam’zell !’ stammered James ; ‘ what for ?’

‘ Ah, you may well ask,’ said she, shrugging her shoulders ; ‘ car, moi, je n’en sais

rien. I know not—it is what I have told you, it is ce scélérat Lamplou.'

'Old Lamps! what has he had to do with it?'

'He does hate me—he is going to marry Madame, and he is determined to ruin me.'

'I'm blessed if I'll brush his clothes or black his old boots any more!'

'But I blame not him!' said Ernestine, spreading out her hands with fine Christian magnanimity; 'I blame not him—it is only an animal! but it is Madame who does turn me out, it is she who has made me the blood to boil. *Mais je m'en vengerai!*' added Ernestine between her teeth, and clenching her little brown fists savagely. 'Don't you stand staring like that; go and order the cart to take me to the station, and let me go upstairs,'—and with that she brushed quickly past her dismayed admirer.

Half-an-hour later Ernestine was in her little attic room in the midst of her disordered wardrobe, with all her worldly goods around her on the floor.

Ernestine sits on the ground in front of her trunk, turning the key in a little common cedar-wood money-box, the contents of which we have looked at before.

Inside she first deposits her month's wages, just given her by Mrs. Blair, and then carefully counts over her savings. Twenty-three pounds seven shillings and twopence—not much, thinks Ernestine ruefully, on which to begin life afresh. If that were all! but then, fortunately, that is not all. Ernestine's money-box holds another valuable object which she thinks is as good to her as a cheque on the Bank of England.

Turning rapidly over the yellow bundle of French love-letters, the faded bunch of

shriveled violets—the gift of the dead soldier lover—which even at this moment she remembers to raise hurriedly to her lips, and the case of jewellery which she reflects can be pawned or sold if the worst comes to the worst, she comes upon a small flat parcel in silver paper at the bottom of the box.

‘Aha !’ says Ernestine aloud, with a triumphant smile, ‘te voilà mon ami ! you have waited long enough, but now at last you are to be of some use to me. This is what comes of a little prudence and forethought ; another, less wise, might have spoken of it before ! What a good thing I did keep him all this time !’ And with a chuckle of delight Ernestine slipped the paper into her leather purse, which again she placed securely in an inside pocket of her black hand-bag ; then locking up the money-box again, she packed it up in her trunk.

A few hours later the French lady's maid had turned her back for ever upon Sotherne Court and the old life that had become so monotonous and yet, by force of long habit, so familiar and so homelike to her.

Juliet Travers was sitting alone in her little morning-room. The writing-table was covered with the morning's unanswered letters, bills, notes, invitations, of all kinds and sizes ; her pen was in her hand, but she was not writing.

There was on her face that bitter, hopeless expression which had become so familiar to it of late, and which had replaced the old eager, impulsive look which had once made it so singularly attractive.

The very droop of her head, the languid fall of her nerveless hands, the set scorn in her full red lips, all told the same story of

the eternal battle going on within—the battle of pride against a hopeless love.

In front of her lay a monogrammed note highly scented with patchouli.

It could not be called a love-letter, and yet there was a spirit of adoration and devotion in every line. Juliet took it up and read it over.

‘I see nothing of you now,’ it ran ; ‘you are so surrounded by new friends, that you don’t seem to care for your old ones. What have I done to offend you that you are so cold and distant to me of late? Twice when I have called you have denied yourself; dear Mrs. Travers, there must be some cause for this change in you.

‘I want to get up a water party to Maidenhead for you. Choose your own day and your own party—anyone you like. We will row up to Cookham, and back in the

cool of the evening to a late dinner at Skindle's.

'I have enlisted Mrs. Dalmaine in my cause, for you refuse to do anything that I ask of you now, and perhaps she will persuade you. Don't be so cruel as to refuse me this.'

'Yours devotedly,

'GEORGE MANNERSLEY.'

'I suppose I must answer it,' said Juliet aloud, as the note dropped wearily from her fingers; 'what a bore this sort of thing is! I used to find these parties and flirtations rather amusing a little time ago. I used to fancy they distracted my mind and took off my thoughts; but now I think they only make me worse. No: I really cannot go—Lord George is so wearisome; and since he has taken to this lover-like frame of mind,

and reproaches me for neglect—for neglect of him ! what a joke !—he is really insufferable. Here is someone to interrupt me. Come in !—who is there ? Ah, it is you, Rosa ; good morning !' and Mrs. Dalmaine in a deliciously fresh toilette of palest pink muslin, entered.

‘ My dear Juliet, have you heard from Lord George this morning ? because I have.’

‘ Yes, I was just going to answer his note. Here it is.’ And Juliet calmly handed the note to her friend, who read it through with great interest.

‘ How *devoted* the poor man is !’ she exclaimed ; ‘ and you really have behaved very cruelly to him, poor fellow ! Well, what day are you going to fix ? And whom are you going to have for the party ? It must not be till next week, I think—at least I have

not a free day before, and I suppose you are going to allow me to come !'

' My dear Rosa, how you do jump at conclusions ! ' said Juliet laughing. ' I am just going to refuse it altogether.'

' To refuse ! ' exclaimed Mrs. Dalmaine aghast, sinking down into a low chair, and throwing up her little pink-gloved hands in dismay. ' Impossible, Juliet ! what can you be thinking of ? Why, I made so certain of your going, that I stopped at Madame Dentelle's on my way, and ordered a boating suit on purpose ! '

' I am very sorry, Rosa ; but you can easily stop on your way back, and counter-order it.'

' But, Juliet, you must be mad. It would be the very jolliest thing of the whole summer ! I had settled it all ; we would have just two boatfuls—six bachelors and

six married women—no girls, they are always a nuisance. It would be the greatest fun ; we wouldn't have anybody slow—all our own set, you know. You would enjoy it so much. You never will be so stupid as to refuse !'

' I am very sorry to disappoint you, Rosa,' said Juliet a little coldly, 'but I have not the least intention of going. Such parties always get women talked about ; one gets called fast, and perhaps worse.'

' Yes, by slow, spiteful women, who never get a chance of any fun themselves !' said Rosa with a toss of her head.

' No, not only by women : I don't believe that men—nice men—think any the better of one for doing those sort of things.'

' But last year you did just as fast things. Don't you remember that day at Richmond

—only you, and I, and Lady Withers, and all those men ?'

' Yes, and I was very sorry for it afterwards ; but I think very differently now about things ; and besides in any case your party would not do for me, because I have asked my young sister-in-law, Flora Travers, to stay with me ; and I could not take her to that sort of thing, could I ?'

' Oh, if you are going to take up with bread-and-butter girls in their teens ! ' pouted Mrs. Dalmaine.

' Don't be jealous, Rosa,' said Juliet playfully ; ' you know I am not given to "taking up," as you call it, with anybody.'

' No, only with that horrid Colonel Fleming. I believe *he* is at the bottom of this proper fit that has come over you ; he always seems to think everything wrong, and looks daggers at me, as if he thought I was

a shocking bad friend for you, and was corrupting your morals.'

'Very likely he is right,' said Juliet drily; and, dipping her pen in the ink she began to write: 'but I had rather not hear you abuse him. He is an old friend of mine.'

'Yes, so I have heard you say before'—and there was a little silence between the friends, during which Juliet wrote away, steadily refusing Lord George Mannersley's invitation; and Mrs. Dalmaine bit the end of her parasol, and looked as cross and ugly as a pretty little woman can look when she is in a bad temper.

'I am sorry for your disappointment, Rosa,' said Juliet presently, as she leant back in her chair and fastened up her note. 'You must not think me unkind, and I will do anything you like to make up for it. Would

you like me to give a dinner at Hurlingham ?'

' Well, yes, that would be rather nice,' said Rosa, softening a little, and reflecting that nothing pleasant or profitable could accrue from prolonged sulks. ' Of course it depends upon who your party is.'

' Well, I would have anyone you wish for, only I will get Cis and one or two husbands, if you don't object much,' said Juliet laughing. ' I won't ask yours ! '

' Heaven forbid ! ' ejaculated Mrs. Dalmaine fervently.

' And of course I must have little Flora Travers.'

' And will you ask Lord George ? ' asked Rosa a little timidly.

Juliet laughed. She had knowledge enough of the world to know how readily a

'bosom friend' will pounce on an admirer out of favour.

'Oh yes, by all means, if you care about him—you are quite welcome to him,' she added a little scornfully.

Mrs. Dalmaine flung herself on her knees at her friend's side and kissed her rapturously.

'You darling you really are a brick, Juliet; and don't you really mind my flirting a little wee bit with him?'

'Not the least in the world!'

'One thing more, Juliet—you won't go and ask that solemn old Colonel of yours, will you? He would quite spoil all our fun.'

'I have not the least intention of inviting Colonel Fleming,' said Juliet rather coldly, pushing back her friend's rapturous embraces. 'I don't think he would enjoy himself in the very least in *our* set!' she added

with a bitter scorn that was quite unintelligible to her hearer.

A knock at the door, and the footman entering announced that ‘a young person’ wished to speak to Mrs. Travers.

‘The dressmaker, I suppose,’ said Juliet, rising. ‘Post these letters, William, and tell her to come upstairs : I will see her here. I am sorry to turn you out, Rosa, but I have a good deal to do this morning, and I must get this dressmaker’s business over as quickly as I can ; I will call for you to drive at five o’clock. William, open the door for Mrs. Dalmaine, and then ask the young woman to come up.’

And Mrs. Dalmaine went.

‘One minute, Miss Richards,’ said Juliet, not looking up from her writing things, as the door opened, and the rustle of a woman’s dress announced the entrance of the ‘young

person.' 'Wait one minute, please, and I will attend to you.'

'Madame?' said a hesitating voice behind her with a pure Parisian ring, which certainly did not belong to honest little Miss Richards.

Mrs. Travers turned round with a start.

'Ernestine!' she exclaimed in amazement, 'what has brought you to town? Has Mrs. Blair come up, or—you look very strange—is your mistress ill?' she added hurriedly.

'No, Madame: Madame Blair is quite well, or was so yesterday morning when I last saw her.'

'Then, what have you to say to me, Ernestine? You look very uncomfortable standing there by the door—won't you sit down?'

Ernestine did indeed look strangely nervous and uncomfortable. She accepted

Mrs. Travers' offer, and sat herself down on the edge of the high-backed chair nearest to the door.

'Madame,' she began hesitatingly, 'I have come to you in great trouble. Madame Blair has yesterday sent me out of her house without a moment's warning: only just time to pack my clothes and be off.'

'Indeed, Ernestine, I am very sorry to hear it,' said Juliet gravely; 'you must, I fear, have committed some serious fault. Tell me, my poor girl, what it is, that I may see if I can help you.'

And then Ernestine began to cry.

'Indeed, Madame, I have done nothing,' she gasped out between her sobs, 'absolument rien. Madame would not even tell me why she sent me away; she has said she would give me a good character, but she would not let me stay one day longer, and

she would not tell me why I was to go ; some evil persons have poisoned her mind against me, I think.'

' This sounds very strange, Ernestine ! ' said Juliet ; but, from her own knowledge of Mrs. Blair's character, it did not appear to her so very unlikely that some sudden caprice might not have set her stepmother against her former favourite.

' She has given me but my month's wages, and not one sou more, after all these years that I have so faithfully served her ! ' sobbed Ernestine.

' My poor girl, I am very sorry for you,' said Juliet compassionately. She had never much liked Ernestine, but she had liked Mrs. Blair still less, and she could readily believe in her injustice and harshness to an old servant. ' Don't cry, Ernestine ; I will do all I can to help you to get another place.'

‘How good you are, Madame ! But, alas ! I must not stay here, for troubles never come alone, and the very day I left—yesterday, it was—I heard from ma pauvre mère—ma pauvre mère !’ she added, sobbing bitterly. Ernestine’s mother had been dead ten years.

‘She is very old, cette chère mère, and she writes to me to say that she can no longer do her work, and the officers de police have come and seized all her furniture—and she has not even a bed—think of that, Madame Travers, not a bed ; and she past seventy !’

‘Dear, dear ! Ernestine this is very sad,’ said Juliet, much distressed. ‘What can you do ?’

‘I must go to Paris at once, Madame, and I have only just enough for my journey,

not one sou to relieve my aged parent when I get there !'

' My poor girl, of course I will lend you, give you, I mean—anything you want ! ' cried Juliet, rising and reaching out her hand to take her purse off the writing table, for she seldom stopped to enquire into a case of need. Juliet was generous and open-handed to a fault.

' Stay, Madame ; ' cried Ernestine, rising with the air of a tragedy queen, and stretching out her hand to ward back the proffered charity. ' Never shall it be said that Ernestine Guillot came to any member of the family she had served so long—to *beg* ! No, Madame, I will have no gift from you ; I ask but a fair price, Madame, I have something to sell ! '

' To sell ? Well, if you are too proud to borrow, Ernestine,' said Mrs. Travers with a

smile, ‘I will do what I can to *buy* from you. Is it some trinket that you have?’

‘No, Madame, it is no bijou;’ and, after much mysterious fumbling among the folds of her dress, Ernestine proceeded to draw forth from her pocket a small flat parcel in silver paper.

Mrs. Travers stretched out her hand for it, but Ernestine did not give it to her. ‘Non pas, Madame!’ she said; ‘I first must know what you will give for him?’

‘How can I say unless I know what it is? Name your own price; what do you think it worth?’

‘Would Madame give me fifty pounds?’ enquired Ernestine, not without hesitation.

‘Fifty pounds! Why, what can it be to be worth so much?’ said Juliet, considerably taken aback.

‘It is a letter, Madame.’

‘Fifty pounds for a letter !’ cried Juliet, in amazement. ‘My good girl, you must be mad ! Who would give fifty pounds for a letter ?’

‘I think that you will, Madame,’ answered Ernestine calmly. Something in her voice and manner struck Juliet as singularly strange. Her face was bent, looking down at the packet in her hands, which she slowly and with a good deal of ostentation unwrapped from the two or three papers in which it was folded.

‘This letter, Madame—or rather, this part of a letter, for it is but the half that is left—was written more than five years ago—for the date is still here—to you.’

‘To me?’

‘Yes, Madame, to you. Madame Blair did steal it and tear it up ; and yesterday, as I was turning out all my old boxes to pack

up my things, I did find this half left in the lining of an old dress she did give me three years ago, and which was so worn and *en chiffons* that I had never even picked it to pieces—it was not worth anything but rags—and there I did find your letter, Madame.'

'Let me see the handwriting,' said Juliet in a faint voice, making a step towards her—whilst the whole room seemed to swim in front of her eyes.

Ernestine held up the fragment of the letter firmly in both her hands.

'Fifty pounds, Madame, and it is yours!'

One glance, and Mrs. Travers turned rapidly away to her writing-table, unlocked the drawer, pulled out her cheque-book, and hurriedly filled in the fifty pounds to Ernestine Guillot or Order.

'Here is the money,' she said sternly.
'I do not believe your story about your

mother—but take this cheque, give me my letter, and go back to your own country, and never let me see your face again.'

Bowing her head with a murmured remonstrance, Ernestine passed out of the room, as she passes out of this story, and Juliet saw her no more. And Juliet Travers stood motionless in the middle of the room, grasping the torn yellow fragment of her past life in her hand.

Before her dazed eyes, upon the faded page, the words of love and devotion, seen now for the first time, trembled all blotted and blurred through her tears; dear words of tender entreaty, of passionate love, of undying devotion; words that she had waited and pined for so long in vain, with such mad hopeless longing, and that had lain so long unanswered and unheeded.

With a bitter cry Juliet flung up her arms.

‘ Too late ! My God, it comes too late ! ’ she cried, and then fell forward across the table with the letter clasped against her heart in a passion of despairing tears.

The footman once more opened the door and announced—

‘ Colonel Fleming.’

CHAPTER II.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

COLONEL FLEMING, thus suddenly ushered into the room, made one step forward and then stopped short in some confusion.

‘My dear Mrs. Travers, you are in trouble —what is the matter? Can I help you; or rather I had better leave you—I have come at an inopportune moment.’

Juliet was standing with her face turned away from him, stifling down those bitter sobs which his entrance had interrupted. For a moment, prudence and wisdom counselled her to say, ‘Yes, leave me, I am not well,’ and to let him go. But for one moment,

and then the old impetuous nature rose within her, the nature that was weak and uncalculating in its possibly unwise impulses, yet ever true and honest to itself.

She turned quickly towards him, and placed the faded yellow letter in his hands.

‘Not inopportune, Colonel Fleming,’ she said, in a low, trembling voice, as she looked up at him with eyes all heavy with unshed tears; ‘you never came at a more appropriate moment—look at that! ’

Hugh Fleming looked down at the torn paper she had thrust into his hand, and turned it over wonderingly.

‘What is it?’ he said, and then with a sudden flush he recognised his own handwriting, and remembered at once what letter it was that she had given him.

He looked up at her almost angrily, and

then walked away to the window, and stood with his back towards her.

What did she mean by showing him this old disregarded, disdained love-letter, of which for years she had never given the faintest sign or acknowledgment? Was it to mock at his love and to insult him?

But no! what then meant her tears and her agitation? and why was the letter all torn and mutilated?

‘ What does it mean ? ’ he asked, coming back close to her as she stood with drooping head, supporting herself with both hands against the edge of the table.

‘ It means—’ she said looking up at him, whilst a bright flush covered her face—‘ it means, that for years I have misunderstood you and done you injustice, that I thought you had scorned and forsaken me—it means that I have found out my mistake—it means,

O God, Hugh ! it means that my heart is broken !'

With a cry she sank down again as he had first found her, with her arms stretched out before her and her head bowed upon them, whilst convulsive sobs shook her whole frame.

Scarcely as yet understanding her meaning, but filled nevertheless with a great yearning pity for her sorrow, Hugh Fleming stood by her side softly stroking the small dusky head as it lay bowed down in bitter grief before him.

'My poor child !' he said gently, whilst his compassionate hands strayed tenderly as a woman's over her soft dark hair, and by degrees the soothing touch quieted and calmed her.

'Now tell me, Juliet,' he said at length, when her sobs had ceased, and he had with

gentle force raised her and placed her in an arm-chair. ‘Tell me now, for I hardly understand what you mean, and why the sight of that old forgotten letter should have upset you so strangely.’

‘Oh, don’t you understand,’ she said, wringing her hands together, ‘don’t you see that I never received it—never saw it until to-day.’

Colonel Fleming started.

‘Never saw it before !’ he repeated in amazement. ‘What do you mean ! can you mean that you never received it ?’

‘Never !’

‘That you thought I had left England for years without a line or a word—that I had deserted you in such a heartless way, Juliet ! Did you think that of me ?’ he asked in great agitation.

Juliet nodded sadly.

‘I did think all that of you,’ she answered sorrowfully. ‘I lost my belief in you and in all mankind.’

‘But I cannot understand it,’ he said, passing his hand in a bewildered way over his forehead; ‘it seems impossible. Why I wrote it quite a week before I left England; and yes, I remember perfectly that I posted it myself—of course I could not have addressed it wrongly—it seems impossible that it could have gone wrong! And besides, if so, how did it come into your possession now? By what chance have you suddenly found it again?’

‘It was brought to me not ten minutes ago by Ernestine—you don’t remember Ernestine? She was my stepmother’s French maid. It seems that Mrs. Blair has sent her away very suddenly for some cause or other; and partly, I expect from revenge, partly to

extract money from me, she brought me this letter.'

'But how on earth did she get it?'

'Her story is that she has only just found it slipped down between the linings of an old dress which Mrs. Blair gave her about that time, and which she had never unpicked nor made any use of; but that in turning out all her things, in order to pack them to go away, this old fragment of a letter fell out. She says—what must be true—that Mrs. Blair stole it out of the post bag, and destroyed it.'

'Good God! what could induce the woman to commit such an iniquity!' exclaimed Hugh, pacing excitedly up and down the room. 'What cause, what possible reason, could she have for such a wicked action?'

'It seems indeed hardly conceivable that

anyone could do such a thing,' answered Juliet; 'and yet I suppose that there is very little that a spiteful wicked woman will not do to injure another.'

'But was she indeed so wicked and spiteful?' asked Hugh, as he came back and sat down beside her. 'Are you indeed sure that it was Mrs. Blair who did this thing? It hardly seems consistent with her character. I remember she used often to speak of you to me with great affection; and although she always seemed to be a very silly and conceited woman, yet I should have thought her a perfectly harmless one. Indeed Juliet, I used often to think that you were hard on her.'

'Did you?' said Juliet in astonishment, 'did you really? In what way could you have thought me hard on her?'

'I never thought that you made sufficient

allowance for her very frivolous and childish nature.'

'Ah, you did not know her as well as I did!' said Juliet, with a short bitter laugh.
'All that silly gushing childishness was put on. Mrs. Blair is by no means a fool; she is as cunning and designing a woman as I ever met in my life, and perfectly dishonest and unscrupulous. Years ago I remember how she used to work and work with that soft playful manner, and yet with untiring perseverance, at anything she wanted to get out of my poor father. Young as I was, I could see perfectly through all her lies and artifices. I believe she moved heaven and earth to get my father to make a will that would give her a life interest in Sotheorne, curtail my rights, and place me under her guardianship and control. But my father was too wise for that; and when

she found how things had been left, she hated me. Outwardly she was all sweetness and affection, because it suited her interests to be so ; but in reality she hated me bitterly, because I was rich and she was poor, because Sotherne was mine and she only a guest in it at my pleasure.'

'But still,' argued Colonel Fleming, 'why should she have stopped my letter ? It seems such a senseless, meaningless piece of spite.'

'She stopped your letter because—because—' said Juliet hesitatingly, and a deep flush covered her face as she nevertheless ended her sentence bravely—'because she knew that had I received it I should have married you.'

Hugh Fleming shaded his face with his hand and was silent.

'She had found out that much about me,' continued Juliet after a short silence ; 'she

was sharp enough for that ; for you know I was never very clever at hiding my feelings,' she added with a little sad smile that was unspeakably touching.

Still Colonel Fleming did not speak, and Juliet went on, after a pause—

' Had things turned out so, it is certain that Sotherne and not London would have been my permanent home—and in that case Mrs. Blair would certainly not have continued to live there. I could never have tolerated her presence—she would have been forced to seek another home ; and Sotherne is a comfortable house, and she gets it rent-free. It would not at all have suited her to leave it. She did not want to leave it. What she wanted is exactly what has happened. I see perfectly through all her devices now : she wanted me to marry a man who had no country tastes, whose society

was not a sufficient resource to me to enable me to endure it in the retirement of a country home, and as whose wife I should probably prefer the excitement and variety of a London life. 'Everything,' added Juliet very bitterly, 'everything has turned out perfectly to her satisfaction: she first intercepted and tore up your letter—she then urged a marriage with Cis upon me in every possible way; other circumstances—poor little Georgie's death and my own utter recklessness and misery—played most conveniently into her hands. Mrs. Blair has remained in undisturbed possession of Sotherne Court, and I—have made a shipwreck of my life!'

Juliet ceased speaking, and bowed her head down upon her hands; while Hugh Fleming hastily left her side, and, walking away to the window, stood for some minutes with his back turned to her.

When he turned again and spoke to her, his voice was hoarse and trembling.

'Tell me one thing,' he said. 'You have said that your faith in me was broken; is that faith now restored, Juliet? Will you trust me again now?'

'Trust you!' she exclaimed, rising quickly and stretching out both her hands towards him. 'Trust you! How can you ask it! Yes, through life unto death!'

'God bless you for that!' he answered. For one moment he bent over the hands he held within his, and pressed them passionately to his lips—then suddenly dropped them hastily, and without another word turned away and left her alone.

As the front door closed behind Hugh Fleming, the luncheon bell rang. Juliet hastily roused herself, brushed away the traces of her emotion, and went downstairs.

It is all the same—if our hearts are breaking, if we have lost our money or our happiness, if our eldest son has been rusticated, or our daughter has run away with the doctor's assistant—all the same we must go down to our meals at their stated hours, sit unmoved and impassive through the ordained number of courses, talk of the weather, or of any trivial subject we can think of with a calm and smiling face ; and all that we may conceal our wounds from the servants who wait upon us, and who would certainly, if we departed from the ordinary routine of our lives, begin to wonder and chatter over what ailed us.

Juliet Travers would have given a great deal to have escaped the tedious luncheon hour, with the two solemn men-servants in attendance—but it was impossible. She went down, and found Cis already at table.

For a wonder, no one had ‘dropped in,’ and the husband and wife were alone.

‘Not a thing fit to eat!’ Cis said irritably as his wife came in, and not looking up at her. ‘You know I can’t bear all these brown sauces—they always disagree with me; and this is the third day running you have had roast chickens for luncheon. I really wish, Juliet, you would see to things a little better.’

‘I am very sorry, Cis,’ said Juliet rather absently, sitting down and helping herself mechanically to the first thing that was handed to her.

Her husband sat opposite to her, looking the picture of misery. Like most people of delicate health and indolent habits, he was extremely fastidious and dainty in the matter of food.

When they were first married, Juliet had taken some pains to study his tastes and

sancies in this respect ; but when she found that, do what she would, Cis always grumbled equally, she gave up the effort to satisfy him as a hopeless task.

The cooking was always either too plain or too rich to suit him ; this was too strong-flavoured, that had not flavour enough ; and it generally ended in his pushing away his food untasted, and leaving the table in a fit of bad temper that was absolutely childish.

Juliet had no sympathy whatever for these daily complaints. She only felt pity, and almost contempt, for a man who could make a misery out of such trifles.

‘What’s this?’ said Cis, standing up and poking his fork into a game-pie. ‘All messed up with aspic jelly ! Can’t one get a good honest piece of roast meat in the house ?’

‘There is some cold beef on the side-

board,' said Juliet, with a not very lively interest in her voice.

'Yes, I daresay! as tough as leather! I wish you would change the butcher! We get worse meat than anybody else in London.'

'Who's that went out just now?' asked Cis presently, as Juliet did not answer him.

'It was Colonel Fleming,' she answered shortly.

'Then why couldn't you have asked him to lunch?'

'It is a good thing I did not, as you say every thing is so nasty,' she said with a laugh. 'But Colonel Fleming would have stayed, I suppose, if he had wished to do so; I did not think it necessary to ask him.'

'No, you can have that horrid Mrs. Dalmaine and all your stuck-up lords and swells here every day, but you can't be civil

to an old friend like Fleming !' said Cis tauntingly.

Juliet bit her lip and was silent.

'I am going down to Sotherne tomorrow,' she said presently; 'we have no dinner engagement, and I am thinking of running down for the day.'

Now it so happened that Cis was under a promise to take Gretchen Rudenbach down to the Crystal Palace for an afternoon concert, and he had been wondering much how he should manage to escape unnoticed from home for the best part of the day.

Cis was at heart terribly afraid of his wife. His friendship with Gretchen was, in truth, of the most innocent character, and if from the first he had made no secret of it with his wife, she would probably have been only too glad that he should find amusement anywhere, to object in the very least to it.

But he had liked to keep up the little halo of romance with which his intercourse with Gretchen had from the first been surrounded. Cis Travers thought of no actual evil with regard to Gretchen Rudenbach, and yet he would have liked to be suspected of it ; and it flattered his vanity to compromise her by taking her about with him rather publicly.

More than once lately, he had been noticed at Richmond and at Maidenhead on a hot afternoon, with the blue-eyed music-player, when his wife was driving in the Park, or entertaining her friends at afternoon strawberries and tea—perfectly unconscious of her husband's occupations.

And it so happened that Cis had one of these expeditions with Gretchen in contemplation for the morrow, and had moreover been wondering what excuse he could frame for dining as well as spending the afternoon

at the Crystal Palace. So that, when Juliet announced her intention of going down to Sotherne, his face cleared at once, and he answered with alacrity.

‘ Well, I think you had better ; you have not been down to Sotherne for some time, and you ought to run down occasionally. You won’t want me, I suppose ? ’

‘ Oh dear no, thank you ! I am only going to see Mrs. Blair, and to look how Andrews has planted the garden out this summer. And perhaps I shall go on to Broadley and bring Flora back with me, if she can get ready in time.’

‘ Very well, then ; as you say we have no dinner engagement, I think I will dine out, and then you need not hurry back before the evening train ; it will be cooler for you to come back by, this hot weather ; and if you are home by half-past nine, it will, I

suppose, be in plenty of time for your evening engagements: if I am dining out, it will leave you free.'

'Thank you, Cis,' said Juliet, slightly surprised, for her husband did not often study her convenience and comfort. 'It will be pleasanter, certainly, to come up by the later train, and will give me more time there. Oh, yes, I shall be in plenty of time; I have only Lady Wither's ball, and need not go to that till eleven—and if I am tired, I shall very likely not go to it at all.'

And so it was settled.

Cis went his way up to Notting Hill after lunch, to settle with Gretchen about calling for her the next day, and to ask her to dine with him at the Crystal Palace after the concert; whilst Juliet went about her daily rounds of visits and shopping. But driving along at a foot's-pace under the trees

in the Park, listening wearily the while to Mrs. Dalmaine's chatter, she felt notwithstanding, that the world was a little better and brighter and happier to her, for that torn yellow letter that was folded upon her heart.

CHAPTER III.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

SMOTHERED in dust, and creaking dismally like a creature in agonies, the twelve o'clock train was steaming into the station at Sotherne.

The very sight made one hot—so covered with fine white dust and so begrimed with dirt and heat was every carriage and every passenger.

Simmonds, the porter, had sauntered leisurely forwards. No one now ever got out at Sotherne, and, apparently, no one ever got in—no one, at least, of any signifi-

cance. Only a fat farmer from a second-class carriage, and two rough-looking drovers from a third, got out ; whilst one girl with a bundle in a blue-checked handkerchief was waiting to get in.

To-day, however, there was a little variety, for a lady got out of one of the dusty, hot cushioned first-class carriages.

At the sight of her Simmonds, who had been bestowing considerable attention upon the blue-bundled young lady, suddenly and mercilessly left that damsel to find a seat for herself, and hurried forward touching his cap obsequiously.

‘ I don’t think the carriage has come yet ma’am,’ he said, taking Mrs. Travers’ hand bag and shawl from her, and shading his eyes with his hand as he looked down the white highroad.

‘ I don’t expect the carriage,’ answered

Mrs. Travers. ‘Is your wife quite well, and the baby?’

‘Quite well, thank you ma’am. You will find it very hot walking, ma’am,’ added the man respectfully. ‘Should I send a boy up to the house to say you’ve come, ma’am? He wouldn’t be gone long, if you would not mind sitting in the waiting-room.’

‘No, thank you, Simmonds; I had rather walk. I shall go slowly, and I dare say I shall not find it very hot.’

Nevertheless Juliet did find it very hot indeed.

It was one of those perfectly breezeless, cloudless days, when the whole air seems hazy and swimming with the heat. By the time she had walked along the quarter of a mile of dusty highroad she began to regret that she had not allowed Simmonds to send

up the boy for the carriage. But the worst part of the walk was over.

Presently, by a path well known to her, she turned into a cornfield, cutting off the corner of which she came to a small wicket gate which led into her own park. Here at once was shade and peace and loveliness.

Juliet was in no hurry ; she sat down under the first tree she came to and took off her hat.

Before her through the gate lay the corn-field through which she had passed, already in full ear, flecked all over with blue and purple cornflowers and great scarlet poppies, above which a thousand white and yellow butterflies fluttered ceaselessly ; behind her were the great woods that were her own ; from their deep shades she could hear the soft cooing of the wood pigeons, the occasional crackle of the branches as some squirrel

scampered along them, and the soft everlasting ripple of the leaves. A little stream babbled fresh and cool at her feet, fringed by drooping ferns and tall meadow-sweet and star-like wild-parsley flowers. Behind her, from the green slope hard by, came the steady munch of big-eyed dark-skinned Alderney cows standing knee-deep in the luscious grass; and right above her head up in the deep blue sky, was one fluttering lark singing away with all his might and main.

Sweet sounds and sights and smells ! How delicious, how wonderful, after months of brick and mortar, of the stone pavements and the stunted shrubs of London squares ! How intoxicating to find oneself suddenly transported into a scene like this ! What a feast for the tired eyes is all the luxuriant greenery of midsummer ! What peace to

the wearied ears and head are the hundred hushing sounds of a summer's day!

Who is there that understands the country with the deep joy, the intensity of appreciation, the delight too rapturous for words, of the imprisoned Londoner set free for one blessed day from the unloveliness of his daily surroundings !

It is worth while to live nine months of the year in a city for the sake of the keen delight of the other three : a delight which I believe no country nurtured person, however fond he may be of country life and country pursuits, ever understands and realises with the same intensity.

Juliet had all the vivid imagination, the deep poetry of soul which is above all needful to constitute a true lover of nature. It was not merely to her a fine day and a pleasant prospect ; there was a whole world

to her in the fair sights and sounds around her. There was a meaning in the deep shadows under the trees and the yellow glare of the sunlight beyond, a rhythm in every babble of the brook, a poem in every waving flower on its banks ; it was like an essay on life to her to sit and look upon it all, like a lesson in all that is best and purest and loveliest. Sweet teachings of nature ! how is it that to some you are but a blank meaningless page, whilst others can read all the wisdom of your hidden story as in an open book ?

Tired with the heat of her journey, and soothed by the murmuring sounds around her, Juliet leant her head back against the tree under which she sat, and gradually fell asleep. A little breeze from beneath the drooping woods caught the soft rings of her dark hair ; low-voiced insects hummed and buzzed about her ; flakes of

scented blossom fluttered down from the lime-tree above, and the brook gurgling on beside her blended vaguely with the music of her dreams.

Such a sweet picture she looked, sitting there in her cool blue muslin dress, with her head thrown a little back, her lips a little parted, and her hands clasped loosely together in front of her! She looked very young—hardly more than a girl; and yet there were many sad drooping lines on the clear pale face, that would never perhaps look free from care and suffering again.

By and by, a cloud stole for an instant over the face of the sun, and with it the breeze freshened. With a start and a little shiver, Juliet awoke and sprang to her feet. ‘I did not come down here to go to sleep!’ she said aloud to herself, as she looked at her watch and found that she had wasted

nearly half an hour. Skirting the shady border of the wood, she began slowly to climb the side of the hill, and presently the many-twisted chimneys and the three red gables of Sotherne Court appeared before her. Leaving the park, she turned into the gardens through the shrubbery gate. No one seemed to be moving around the house or gardens. It was about the men's dinner-time, and the roller was standing on the lawn and the wheelbarrow on the gravel walk just as Andrews and his assistant had left them to go off to their midday meal.

The windows stood wide open, and soft muslin draperies fluttered out from the morning-room. Mrs. Blair had adopted as her own the little room that used in the old days to be Juliet's special retreat. It was here that she was sitting on this particular morning. A white muslin dress

plentifully adorned with pink ribbons decked the somewhat angular lines of her spare figure, and a mob-cap of muslin and lace to match invested her with a combined elegance and simplicity suitable to the novel character of a betrothed damsels in which she was now figuring.

She sat on the sofa, whilst in front of her on a low stool squatted the happy lover, obediently holding a skein of white wool, which his lady-love was deftly winding off his outstretched red hands.

‘Now, Daniel !’ said the lady playfully, ‘how can I wind if you fidget so ? Do keep still !’

‘My charming love, who could keep still at the feet of so much beauty !’ returned the lover gallantly ; ‘when the heart is on fire, the—ahem, the—a—tenement of clay is naturally restless !’

Mr. Lamplough was secretly ardently desiring to get up, as the position into which Mrs. Blair had sportively pushed him was beginning to be sadly trying to his back and knees.

‘ You naughty darling ! ’ she answered, laughing affectedly and shaking her finger at him ; ‘ always flattering your poor Maria ! When we are married, Daniel, I am afraid you will no longer make me such pretty speeches ! ’

The Reverend Daniel promptly reflected that, when he was married, he was not likely to waste much time squatting on the floor like a journeyman tailor at his Maria’s feet ; but courtship, as he was well aware, brings its own appointed duties.

‘ Cruel, cruel angel ! ’ he exclaimed tragically ; ‘ already you begin to doubt my devotion ! ’

‘Never, my dearest love—do not suspect your own Maria! It is my exquisite sensitiveness that leads me for one moment astray. Doubt you, my love!—you that are the kindred soul so long sought for in vain by this widowed, lonely heart!’

And here Mrs. Blair, dropping the ball of wool, melted into gentle tearless sobs behind her lace handkerchief; upon which Mr. Lamplough joyfully seized the opportunity of releasing his cramped legs from their aching posture, and rising from the ground with difficulty, by holding on to the corner of the table, he landed himself safely upon the sofa by his Maria’s side, where he proceeded to clasp her somewhat shrinking form to the rumpled and not altogether spotless shirt-front which veiled his manly bosom.

It was at this critical moment in the pro-

ceedings of these fond lovers that an intruding shadow suddenly darkened the window.

With a little scream, Mrs. Blair pushed back her lover.

‘We are watched, Daniel !’ she cried ; ‘for Heaven’s sake, leave me !’

The Reverend Daniel had also caught sight of the interloping somebody outside, and was not slow to take the hint. It was all very well to act the adoring lover in strict privacy with his charming widow, but he had no fancy for making himself ridiculous before a third person. With a sudden bound, he sprang to the door; and when Juliet Travers, pushing aside the muslin curtains, stepped in through the long French window, she just caught sight of a pair of black legs flying precipitately through the door.

It did not strike her that she had come

in at an inopportune moment. It could not have been Higgs, of course, who had bolted in so undignified a manner; and it only vaguely crossed her mind that Mrs. Blair's visitor, whoever he might be, had an unpleasantly rough manner of slamming the door behind him.

Mrs. Blair, at the sudden appearance of her stepdaughter, jumped up with a little cry of genuine astonishment.

'My dearest Juliet, how you made me start! I could not think who it was. What made you come in that way? and what has brought you down to-day? and why did you not write, my darling girl? and, dear me! you must have walked from the station—and in all this heat!'

'Yes, I walked—' answered Juliet quietly, as she threw down her hat and sunshade upon the table. 'I had something to say to

you, Mrs. Blair—something that could not well be written ; so I thought it best to come down myself.'

'Have you, dearest Juliet? but you will have something to eat first ? surely you must want something after your journey—a cup of tea or a little claret, at all events, to cool you ?'

'No, thank you, Mrs. Blair,' answered Juliet, laying her hand on her stepmother's arm as she was rising to ring the bell ; 'do not ring for anything—I shall have the carriage to take me on to Broadley to lunch as soon as I have said what I have to say to you. I want nothing but your attention for a few minutes.'

Something in Juliet's manner suddenly filled Mrs. Blair with a vague apprehension.

'Dear me !' she said, with a little nervous laugh ; 'what can you have to say to me,

Juliet? I am sure I am delighted to listen to anything you have to say; but is it so *very* important, that you cannot even rest and have some luncheon first?

‘Yes, it is very important,’ answered Juliet gravely. And then for a minute she was silent, standing looking sternly down upon the woman who had wronged her so deeply and so remorselessly.

Mrs. Blair had turned a little pale under her rouge, and her heart was thumping in a manner very unusual to her. She could not meet her stepdaughter’s eye, but sat fidgeting nervously with the pink ribbon bows on the front of her dress.

‘I have seen Ernestine,’ began Juliet. A sudden sense of relief sent the blood back into Mrs. Blair’s face.

‘Oh, my dear Juliet,’ she said with alacrity, ‘I know that you have come to plead

with me about that poor misguided girl! I see she has been to you with some tale about my cruelty and harshness in sending her away so suddenly; it is just like your goodness and charity of heart to take her part and to come down to plead for her—and of course it *does* sound rather severe, I admit, after so many years, to send her off at a day's notice; but if you heard all the rights of it, and *my* version of the story, I think you would agree with me that I have done perfectly right in sending her away—such a flighty, untrustworthy wretch as she has turned out, and has been giving herself such airs—impertinence to my visitors, and Heaven knows what besides!'

' You are mistaken,' answered Juliet quietly; ' it is not about your dismissal of your maid that I came to speak. Whatever I may or may not think of your sending her away

so suddenly, you had a perfect right to do so, and I should not dream of interfering with or questioning your arrangements. No, Mrs. Blair, it is not of your maid's dismissal, but of something which she told me that I have to speak to you.'

Again the colour fled from Mrs. Blair's cheeks.

'Something she told you!' she repeated blankly.

'There was a letter,' said Juliet, 'a letter which should have been received by me five years ago—that letter is now, or was until yesterday, in Ernestine's possession. Mrs. Blair, I have come to ask you why that letter never reached me?'

'A letter?—I cannot think what you mean! What have I to do with Ernestine's letters? What on earth do you suppose that I am likely to know about it?' faltered Mrs.

Blair, whilst there flashed rapidly through her mind the recollection of all that had happened on the morning of the arrival of that letter which she had destroyed.

As distinctly as if it had been yesterday she remembered tearing it in half upon her maid's sudden entrance, and then throwing it into the fire. No, there could not be a doubt of its destruction—she remembered well how the bright flames had danced up and licked up the white paper in a second, and how the charred and blackened fragments had fluttered with the smoke up into the chimney. It was as plain before her eyes as if she could see it now. The letter had most assuredly been utterly destroyed. Ernestine might have guessed at the story and raked it up out of revenge, but she could have no possible proof—and who would believe the word of a discarded servant against that of her mistress?

She might (putting together the fact of her fetching the bag and seeing the blazing letter) have got hold of the truth, but it was quite impossible that she could bring forward any evidence to support her accusation ; therefore Mrs. Blair rapidly decided that her best and safest plan was to brazen it out and to deny it utterly.

‘ I really cannot think what you are talking about, Juliet,’ she said, in well-feigned bewilderment. ‘ You look at me in such a strange manner—you seem almost to be accusing me of something ! ’ she added, with a nervous laugh.

‘ I do accuse you of something ; I accuse you of intercepting and destroying a letter addressed to me by Colonel Fleming just before he went away to India ! ’

‘ Juliet, you positively insult me ! what can you mean ? I intercept a letter, indeed !

I interfere with another person's correspondence! What on earth do you take me for? I never was so insulted in my life!' and Mrs. Blair's voice actually quivered with the force of her righteous indignation.

'Then, how do you account for this?' said Juliet, unfastening her pocket-book and holding out to her the torn letter which Ernestine had brought her. 'This, Mrs. Blair, your maid found in the lining of a dress which you had given her!'

Mrs. Blair stared blankly and speechlessly at the fragment in Juliet's hand; she recognised the letter immediately, but the sight of it filled her with utter amazement. How on earth did Ernestine get hold of it? for of course she knew at once that the dress story was a fabrication.

'I know nothing of it,' she faltered at

last; ‘I never saw it before: it must have been Ernestine’s doing entirely.’

‘What motive could Ernestine have had?’ exclaimed Juliet impatiently. ‘Mrs. Blair, do not take the trouble to deny what is as plain as daylight. You knew that I expected a letter from Colonel Fleming, for I had told you that he was going to write to me. You watched for it and intercepted it; how it came into your maid’s possession I neither know nor care; but I do know that you—and you alone—stole my letter.’

Then Mrs. Blair, driven from her last entrenchment, burst into tears. ‘I did it for the best, Juliet—indeed, indeed I did. I was so afraid you would be led into making an imprudent match. I only wished for your happiness.’

‘*My* happiness!’ repeated her stepdaughter scornfully. ‘You did not think

much of my happiness, I fancy. All you wanted was your own selfish ends and your own cruel revenge on a girl whom you always hated and envied.'

'Dearest Juliet, do not speak so! Pray believe me—I meant it for the best, I did indeed!' and Mrs. Blair sobbed and wrung her hands, and looked the picture of woe.

'And do you know what your "best" has done for me?' answered Juliet in a low concentrated voice; 'do you know that you have ruined my happiness and embittered my soul? do you know that you have spoilt two lives, his and mine? Remember that, if evil were to come of it, it would be your fault—lie at your door; and bitterest curses would fall upon your head.'

'Juliet, Juliet, spare me!' cried the unhappy Mrs. Blair, covering her ears with both her hands.

‘What had I done—?’ continued Juliet bitterly and wildly; ‘good Heavens! what had I done to you, that you should have punished me so cruelly? What in the whole course of my life had I been guilty of to deserve such a terrible retaliation? Had you not lived under my roof, been fed at my expense, been treated in my house with all due honour and respect as my father’s widow? Are you not human, have you no womanly pity, that you were not able to stop short of breaking my heart! How could you do it! Good God! woman, how could you do it!’

She flung up her hands in a paroxysm of despair, whilst tears hot and bitter welled up suddenly into her eyes.

At the sight of her stepdaughter’s emotion Mrs. Blair recovered her presence of mind.

For one moment, in her utter discomfiture, she had sobbed and prayed and owned herself

to be guilty : but she soon began shrewdly to perceive that it would never answer for her to be too humble or too penitent.

The worst was over. Juliet, it is true, knew of her treachery and baseness, but she was not likely to betray that knowledge to others. After all, the cards were still in her own hands, for Juliet's secret was in her possession. She was a married woman, and she loved another man—here to her very face she had acknowledged it ! what a hold such a confession gave Mrs. Blair over her stepdaughter ?

Drawing herself up with a look of virtuous horror, Mrs. Blair addressed her stepdaughter in an altered voice.

‘Juliet, I am amazed at you. Whatever my faults may have been—and I confess that I am sorry now for what was simply an error of judgment, caused by over-anxiety for

your happiness and welfare—whatever *mistake* I may have committed, I have at all events never lost sight of the decencies, I may say the moralities, of life. But can I believe my ears, that you, a married woman, the wife of Cecil Travers, have the audacity to confess to *me*, your father's widow—a pure-minded, virtuous woman—to own to *me* with your own lips that you love another man who is not your husband ! ’

‘ Silence, woman ! ’ cried Juliet, starting from her seat and crimsoning with anger to the very roots of her hair ; ‘ how dare you say such words ! what is it to you whom I love or whom I don’t love ? ’

‘ I am disgusted—simply disgusted ! ’ said the widow, turning away and waving her scented handkerchief before her face as if the thought of Juliet’s iniquities made her feel faint.

Juliet stifled down her anger and laughed a short bitter laugh.

‘ You will probably be still more disgusted at what I have to say further to you, Mrs. Blair,’ she said scornfully. ‘ You have made my house your home for several years —I do not care that you should do so any longer. As soon as it is convenient to you, I shall be much obliged if you will find another abode. I do not wish to hustle you out with unkind haste, but my house is, after your insulting words and your wicked conduct to me, no longer fitted to be your home.’

Mrs. Blair turned livid with rage. She was silent for a minute, and then, with a sudden smile of triumph, she got up and made her stepdaughter a sweeping curtsey.

‘ Very much obliged to you, Mrs. Travers, I am sure! Your revenge is very nicely aimed, certainly; only, unfortunately, it has

no power to wound me. I was on the point of telling you that I no longer require the kind shelter of your house, which I should in any case have left altogether in a few months—to oblige you, I will make it a few weeks. But as I am going to be married very shortly, and have a house of my own in London, I am fortunately quite independent of the charitable tender mercies of my stepdaughter.'

'To be married!' gasped Juliet in amazement.

'Yes—very wonderful, of course,' said the widow, smiling and fanning herself with great *sang-froid*. 'Wonderful, of course, but nevertheless true. My future husband is the eminent divine the Reverend Daniel Lamplough, who has a nice house in Eccleston Street. I daresay I can hurry on my marriage to oblige you, Juliet, and turn out

of Sotherne in about five or six weeks. Have you anything else to say to me ?'

No, Juliet had nothing else to say. In truth, she was so much astounded at this unexpected piece of news, that she forgot all her anger in blank bewildered amazement.

She could only take her leave shortly and coldly, and depart by the way she came ; whilst Mrs. Blair, triumphant to the last, laughed a scornful laugh of victory as her adversary went out.

' I had the best of it there, I think ! ' she said aloud, as soon as Juliet was out of hearing.

And there is no denying it : she *had* very much the best of it. Juliet had been out-trumped

CHAPTER IV.

FLORA.

ON that same morning Broadley House lay full in the midsummer sunshine, whilst its master sat out on the lawn under the shadow of a spreading walnut-tree.

The house was to the full as untidy and dilapidated-looking as of old. There had been no money spent upon house-painters and decorators since the days when little Georgie was the ruling spirit in it and the Squire kept the hounds.

What the old man called a 'lick of paint' had indeed been patched on here and there, just to keep body and soul together, as it

were, in the rambling old house; but there had been no thorough overhauling and doing-up of the doors and windows, no repapering of the rooms, no resuscitation of the cracked yellow plaster and stucco, such as undoubtedly the whole place required in every part.

Neither was the garden any better kept and tended than of yore. The evergreens had grown up long and straggly, and, for want of being regularly clipped, had become weedy and thin-looking near their roots; the borders were a tangled mixture of flowers and weeds, with, if anything, a predominance of the latter; whilst the lawn was badly mown and scratched up by the swarm of chickens and dogs which strayed all day long unreproved over it.

They none of them cared for these things at Broadley. Mrs. Travers, indeed, sometimes fretted unavailingly over the untidiness

and disorder of her surroundings, and pleaded for another gardener, and suggested the ejection of the live-stock from before the drawing-room windows; but the Squire would only grumble savagely—‘Another gardener! pray where’s the money to come from, ma’am?’ whilst Flora regarded the notion of exiling the dogs from any portion of the domain with such indignant horror, that Mrs. Travers, being quite in the minority, had to smother her remonstrances into an aggrieved and snubbed silence.

Squire Travers sits in a low chair under the walnut-tree, dressed in a sort of East Indian planter’s costume of nankeen coloured cotton, with a straw hat on the ground behind him, his spectacles on his nose, and ‘The Field’ on his knees.

Flat on her back on the grass in front of him lies his daughter Flora—her arms

stretched up behind her blonde shiny head, and her grey eyes looking sleepily up at her father from beneath their long dark lashes. Her lithe young figure, in its close fitting pink cotton dress, gathered in by a simple leather belt at her slender waist, is shown off to full advantage by the *abandon* and ease of her attitude. Two fox terriers and a collie puppy at its most riotous age are tumbling and chasing each other with boisterous mirth round and round her recumbent form, without in any way disturbing her tranquillity; and a whole brood of soft white fluffy chickens with their solemnly clacking mother at their head, are pecketing their way over the grass not a couple of yards from her head.

Flora has been dozing, but she is wide awake now, and she is wondering when on earth her father will have finished that article on salmon-culture in ‘The Field.’

‘ He can’t find it so very absorbing,’ she said to herself; ‘ why doesn’t he talk to me instead ? ’ for Miss Flora was a chatterbox and found enforced silence very hard to bear.

‘ Papa ! ’ she said at last, seeing that the salmon-culture had been gone through, and a page on cricket-matches just turned to.

‘ Yes, my love ! ’

‘ Papa, that’s the third small red spider I’ve watched come down straight on the top of your dear old bald head.’

‘ Bless my soul ! you don’t say so, Flora ! ’ said the Squire nervously, putting up his hand to rub his head, and dropping ‘ The Field ’ as he did so.

Flora laughed. ‘ All rubbish, papa—I only wanted you to stop reading ! I’m not going to let you have “ The Field ” again ; ’ and she took possession of the fallen

paper, and placed it safely out of his reach under her own head.

‘Now talk to me, papa.’

‘Talk ! bless the child ! what is there to talk of out of the hunting season ?’

‘Why, there’s Vesper’s new litter, and Jock’s distemper, and whether my mare is to be turned out to grass—and good gracious, papa,’ with a little scornful impatience, ‘can you talk of nothing else but the dogs and horses ?’

The Squire rubbed his chin thoughtfully —what did the child want to talk about? he wondered. Georgie had never wished for any more exalted topic of conversation.

‘I thought you were so fond of the horses and dogs,’ he said, reproachfully, looking at his younger daughter.

‘So I am, the darlings, I love them !’ said Flora, catching at one of the fox terriers

as he bounded over her, and kissing his brown head rapturously ere she released his struggling, kicking body.

‘So I am, of course ; but they are dull to talk about. Do you know of what I have been thinking for the last quarter of an hour ? ’

‘Not in the least.’

‘Well, look up into the tree above you,’ she said, casting up her clear grey eyes as she spoke ; ‘look right up into it. Do you see how the branches all bend out from the trunk in regular curves, and how all the leaves lie one over another in a sort of vaulted roof ? —and listen, papa, to the sort of murmur the voices of the birds make high up above there : do you remember when we went into Wells Cathedral once, when the choristers were practising somewhere out of sight—and we stared up at the roof till the

sound seemed to come from there like angels' voices—don't you remember how lovely it was? Now, doesn't looking up into the walnut-tree remind you of the roof of Wells Cathedral, papa?

Mr. Travers had done as he was told, and leaned his neck back till it ached, to look up straight above his head. He listened attentively to all his daughter said, and then looked down again at her with a puzzled, bewildered face. What could he make of a girl who said a tree was like a cathedral?

'Upon my soul, Flora, I suppose I am very stupid,' he said, almost humbly; 'but I don't see how a green tree can be like Wells Cathedral!'

'Don't you, papa? oh, I see it so plainly,' she answered, with her eyes still above his head, continuing the drift of her own fanciful

imaginings. ‘I can see all the frettings and carvings of the groined roof, and the capitals of the columns with leaves and berries and arabesques, and there is one little grinning demon’s head, yes, and there is another, and another too—those are the bosses, and then a whole legion of little saints and fiends mixed up together under that arch —ah! cruel little puff of wind! it has blown them all away.’

The Squire had looked up again, half fancying the things must be there since Flora saw them, and angry at his own stupidity for not doing so too, and then he looked down again at her in perplexity.

‘What queer things the child has got in her head,’ he said, half to himself. ‘Is it from Wattie, I wonder, that you’ve got all these crazy notions, Miss Flora?’

A faint flush swept over the girl’s face as

her father spoke, and she half raised herself from the ground.

‘Never mind all the nonsense I talk, papa. I like saying aloud all the odd things that come into my head—perhaps I ought not to expect you to understand—but hush! is not that the sound of carriage wheels coming up the drive? Yes, it is a carriage; fancy visitors at this hour in the morning—why, papa!’ springing up gladly, ‘it is the Sotheorne carriage, and there is Juliet inside it,’ and she ran eagerly forward; whilst the Squire, stooping to pick up his ‘Field’ and his straw hat, followed her more leisurely.

‘There must be something wrong in the head of a child that sees cathedrals up in the trees,’ he said to himself again, with a puzzled pucker on his old forehead.

‘Anything wrong with Cis—is my dear boy ill?’ cried Mrs. Travers, coming anxi-

ously out of the front door to meet her daughter-in-law.

Mothers-in-law have a way of thinking that nothing else on earth can occupy the time or thoughts of their sons' wives excepting only those sons, who to the mother are such demi-gods, and to the wife often such very commonplace and faulty personages.

'Nothing is wrong with Cis that I know of,' answered Juliet, smiling, as she alighted from the carriage; 'he was quite well this morning;' and a little pang went through her heart, at the thought that no one asked or cared whether anything was wrong with her: a pang which, an instant after, she accused herself of foolishness for feeling.
'How are you, dear Mr. Travers? can you spare me Flora? I have come to carry her off. Flora, do you think you can pack up your things and be ready to go back with

me in a couple of hours? Never mind if your wardrobe is not quite what it should be —we are not going to a desert; there are plenty of shops in London, you know.'

'Oh Juliet! do you really mean it?' exclaimed the girl, clapping her hands in delight, whilst visions of London, of balls and theatres and flower shows, dreamt of often but never experienced, flashed through her mind and flushed her fair young face with a bright rose tint.

'Flora is too young to go out in London,' said her mother,—'a child not seventeen yet.'

'Indeed, mamma, I am!' interrupted the girl eagerly; 'I was seventeen last Monday —don't you remember? Oh! do let me go!'

'I think she had much better stay at home. I have no opinion of turning girls'

heads with vanity and frivolity, before they are out of the school-room,' said the mother severely.

But the father was thinking of the cathedral up in the walnut-tree. High time something should be done to drive such fanciful notions out of the child's mind !

'Let her go, let her go,' he said. 'What's life to a girl out of the hunting season, with no one but a couple of old folks to talk to? She only gets a pack of nonsense and poetry into her head. You may go with your sister-in-law, my dear; go and pack up your frocks: and, Juliet, come in and have some lunch.'

Mrs. Travers sighed resignedly, as Flora executed a pirouette of delight, and fled indoors with her face all aglow with pleasure to pack up 'her frocks.'

So Juliet carried off her young sister-in-

law to Grosvenor Street. Was it, perhaps, that she needed that pure young presence to defend her against herself?—that she dreaded to return alone to all the storms and temptations of her life—that she required a companion, some one to be with her and stand by her daily, a some one who should be quite a different sort of person from Rosa Dalmaine?

Possibly, for with the events of the last two days there had grown up a great terror in Juliet Travers's heart, a mortal fear, a terrible dread of herself. Whilst she had believed that she was unloved and forgotten she had been indeed miserable, but she had been safe; but with the knowledge which the discovery of that old letter had brought her, that she was not unloved, not scorned, not forgotten, every safeguard of pride and duty behind which she had formerly entrenched herself seemed to be crumbling away.

By the very joy that the knowledge of Hugh Fleming's love gave her, she realised the greatness of her danger. And now her secret was no longer her own—to her very face her enemy, the woman whose selfish cruelty had already ruined her life, had accused her of loving a man not her husband, and had worded her accusation in coarse uncompromising words, that had possibly scared and terrified her more than all her own most heart-searching thoughts. As this woman had wrecked her past, might she not also equally wreck her future?

With a shudder of terror, she turned eagerly from her own thoughts, with a certain sense of security, to the girl who sat beside her in the railway carriage, and who was chattering gaily of the unknown pleasures

and delights which London can contain for sorrowless seventeen.

Flora was in fairyland. The fields and woods and villages, as they flew by in the deepening summer twilight, seemed to her a flower-bordered pathway, that was to lead her to the summit of all her dreams.

She had never been to London before, excepting for an occasional day's shopping, usually including a visit to the dentist, of which she had anything but pleasant reminiscences, and she had never been to a ball in her life. Flora was neither worldly nor frivolous, but she had that craving for enjoyment and pleasure which all young girls naturally possess, and which is so often unwisely checked and smothered away as a sin by mothers who believe themselves to be honestly doing their duty, but who seem to

have entirely forgotten their own young days.

Why, in the name of all that is innocent and good, should not girls enjoy to the utmost their first hey-day of youth, when they are heart-whole and frolicsome as the young lambs in the cowslip-covered fields? God knows that heart-burnings and disappointments, and weariness of mind, come soon enough to most women!

And beyond and above this natural pleasure and excitement in the change that had come into her life, there was hidden away somewhere in the depths of Flora's heart a certain joyous delight in the thought of something very specially happy, which might in all probability come across her path in London.

Now this something had a tangible name —and the name of it was Walter Ellison.

Flora Travers was not at all ‘in love’ with our old friend Wattie ; at least, if you had accused her of such a thing, she would have laughed at you. Wattie was to her as an elder brother, a home authority, a somebody to be at times teased and lorded over, and at other times admiringly listened to and meekly obeyed. She had had very little sisterly intercourse with her own brother —indeed, she knew very little of him at all ; and the little she did know was so uncongenial to her own nature, that she could hardly be said to be fond of him.

But in Wattie Flora had realised, as she thought, all her notions of fraternal affection, and perhaps a something more besides of which she was hardly aware.

When he came down to Broadley from Saturday to Monday, an event which had happened less often now than in the first

years after poor Georgie's death, Flora ran gladly to meet him at the front door, which in opening to admit his handsome figure seemed to her to let in a flood of life and sunshine along with it.

When he talked to her she listened to him patiently, when he lent her books she devoured them eagerly; but when, as frequently happened, he gave her gentle fraternal scoldings and wise little bits of advice, she laughed at him scornfully, and told him to mind his own business, and then after he was gone repented in tears, and strove to do all he wished.

And Wattie loved the girl with all his heart and soul : not as he had loved Georgie, with the fervour and passion of a boy's first love, but soberly and gravely, and none the less deeply that he had hitherto suppressed every outward demonstration of it.

This transferring of his heart from his dead first love to her young sister was not done all in a minute.

Wattie had been attracted to her first because of the reflected light of his affection to Georgie, because she was so heart-broken at her death—and perhaps still more because of her great personal likeness to her sister. But by degrees, as time went on, he grew to love her for herself alone, and to love her with a totally different and distinct love from that he had felt for Georgie.

Not for her sweetness or gentleness or unselfishness could anyone love Flora Travers. None of these things had she in common with Georgie; their love of riding and of all healthy outdoor occupations, and their fair shining hair alone had made the sisters alike.

Flora was wilful and self-indulgent and spoilt, as only the younger child of a doting

old father can be. She asserted her own opinions, spoke out her own views, contradicted her elders, and laughed at them to their faces, with a boldness which horrified Wattie, whilst at the same time it attracted him strangely.

She was so saucy, and so conscious of her own power, and so pretty with it all, that it would have required a stronger minded man than Wattie to have resisted her. And then Flora had a serious side to her volatile nature, a vivid imagination, a refined mind, and the warmest heart in the world.

Walter Ellison was no longer the impetuous lover who had wooed poor Georgie five years ago. He knew very well that the Squire would as joyfully give him his younger daughter, as he had jealously withheld the elder from him in days gone by. But Wattie did not mean to take advantage of that

knowledge. The child should not be taken unawares ; she should have time to look about her, and see other men, and learn her own heart thoroughly before he asked her for it. Meanwhile Wattie stuck to the Bar and worked in earnest. He had long ago given up the idea of rising to fame and fortune by the pursuit of the Fine Arts, and opportunity having on one occasion given him a brief with which he had made a slight success, he buckled down bravely to court the legal muse, and by this time was earning a small but steadily increasing income by his untiring energy and perseverance.

He did not go down very often to Broadley now. He fancied that the Squire's hints and nods and winks had made Flora slightly conscious and confused in his presence, and he did not want her to be driven into considering him as a lover, or even as

an admirer, by the well-meant insinuations of anybody.

If she loved him, she must do so of her own accord, he said to himself, or else not at all.

And yet, all the time he plodded away at his daily work he was not constantly thinking that he was working and toiling for her. Indirectly, for her—yes, if she would have him ; but if not, then for himself.

CHAPTER V.

FLORA IN LONDON.

THE whirl of London life went on—dinners, balls, evening parties all night, flower-shows, afternoon parties, visits, and shops all day—and no one among all the gay crowd of matrons and maids caught the spirit of the life more quickly, or entered more thoroughly into every passing pleasure, than did our little friend Flora Travers.

In three weeks Flora had developed from a girl into a woman ; the hot-bed life of London excitement drew out of her things that had before lain dormant within her, and which it would have taken years of the quiet

humdrum existence of Broadley House to have brought to light.

For in three weeks she had learnt the secret of her own attractiveness. She had gone to her first ball with a thousand tremors and misgivings. As she had followed Juliet up the flower-decked staircase, and had encountered all the gay couples of men and women coming down it—a quadrille was just over—talking and laughing and nodding to each other with the ease of perfect confidence in themselves and in their own enjoyment, her beating heart had sunk down in dismay.

She knew no one. Was it likely that she would get any partners? Who would care to dance with a girl so young and so ignorant of everything connected with London life as she was? And to sit still and watch other girls dance and enjoy themselves was, Flora

felt, more than the fortitude of seventeen could bear. She knew she should disgrace herself and cry. Oh, how heartily she longed to be able to turn back and fly down that bright thronged staircase, jump into the dark carriage again, and be carried home to bed before the dreadful misery which she anticipated should overtake her !

And then, just as these agonised thoughts were at their climax, somebody introduced her to her first partner :

‘ Miss Travers, let me introduce Captain Hartley.’

And an unknown somebody, whom she had not courage to look up at, straightway whirled her away in his arms.

Jack Hartley was wondering what on earth he should say to his partner. The lady of the house had asked him if he minded dancing with a very young girl, who knew

nobody ; and Jack, who was good-natured, pulled a grimace, and submitted to be victimised.

‘ She is pretty, at all events,’ was his first thought, adding, after a dozen steps or so down the room, ‘ and dances well, too, by Jove ! Well, I’d better keep her at it, for I suppose she can’t say a word.’

And keep her at it he did, until his own breath was utterly gone, and he had to come to a stop to recruit it, whilst Flora stood fresh and cool as a summer flower by his side.

‘ Well, I must say something to her,’ thought Jack, when his violent panting was somewhat abated, ‘ so here goes for the Row or the Royal Academy for the nine hundred and sixteenth time this week ! ’ And he was just clearing his throat to open fire upon these interesting topics when a clear sweet voice by his side said :

‘I am afraid you will find me very stupid.’

‘Stupid !’ said Jack, opening his blue eyes in amazement, but feeling rather guilty the while ; ‘what an extraordinary idea ! what can make you think so ?’

‘Girls are always considered stupid when they are quite young. I know you were cudgelling your brains to think of something civil to say to me.’

‘What a witch you are !’ said Jack, laughing at being so cleverly found out, and beginning to notice that his companion was even more than pretty. ‘Well, I won’t deny the soft impeachment ; but I see now that I was blind—you are not like ordinary girls at all.’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Flora, lowering her glance a little under her partner’s admiring gaze, ‘but this is my first ball.’

‘Everybody must have a beginning,’ said Captain Hartley, with reassuring condescension. ‘So it is your first ball, is it? Well, and how do you like it?’

‘Oh, not at all, as yet,’ said Flora, with ingenuous earnestness.

Jack Hartley burst out laughing. ‘Upon my word, Miss Travers, you are not complimentary, considering that I am “as yet” your only partner!’

‘That is just it—I mean,’ correcting herself with a blush, ‘I don’t mean to be rude, of course,—but it is because you *are* my only partner. I know you will be the only one,’ she added, looking melancholy.

‘Do you mean that I am to dance with you the whole evening?’ said Jack, more and more amused.

‘Oh, no, no! how very stupid you are!’

cried Flora, quite distressed; ‘no, I mean of course that no one else will.’

‘Why on earth should you imagine that such an awful state of imbecility is going to befall the whole of the male sex here present?’

‘Because I am seventeen, and I don’t know a single soul in the room,’ answered the girl with a demure solemnity that was almost tragic.

Jack laughed heartily as he passed his arm round her waist, and as he carried her off again among the dancers he whispered, with his long moustache almost brushing against her smooth fair plaits:

‘You little goose, you dance divinely; you are lovely, and, better still, you know how to flirt already. Take my word for it, before the end of the evening you will be queen of the room.’

And he was right. Before the evening was over Flora had more partners than she knew what to do with, and was lording it over them with all the saucy impudence of a young sovereign.

It is little to be wondered at that in three weeks' time there was no longer only one man reigning supreme in Flora Travers' imagination.

Wattie Ellison was no more the dominant influence of her life. Instead of him, dozens of young men of all shades and kinds hustled and jostled each other through her thoughts night and day, one succeeding the other with surprising rapidity. Captain Hartley, with his blue eyes and long moustache, and with the privileged freedom of old friendship which that little talk at her first ball had empowered him to assume, was perhaps the foremost and most constant on

her list of admirers—at all events, he attracted her fancy and touched her vanity more than did any of the others.

Captain Hartley was a young man who understood women and the art of pleasing them thoroughly. He had studied them at all ages and in all moods from his boyhood upwards ; he understood when to pursue them and when to stand aloof, when to cajole and when to appear indifferent, when to gaze with bold admiration and when to glance covertly with feigned timidity—he could be humble with them at times ; but, above all, he knew when and how to be audacious ; for what woman at heart is not attracted by audacity, though she must perforce feign to resent it ? ‘ Faint heart never won fair lady,’ is the truest proverb that ever was written concerning the much hackneyed subject of love-making. In a word, Jack Hartley was

a finished flirt; moreover, he was a cavalry officer, in a crack Lancer regiment, and Flora was at that age when the military element makes a profound impression on the female imagination. When one morning she had been taken down to some field-day at Aldershot, and had seen him trot by at the head of his troop, a brilliant vision of blue cloth and gold lace and shining accoutrements glittering in the sunshine, little Flora gave in at once and believed herself, for that day at least, to be really and truly desperately in love with the fascinating captain.

Meanwhile, Wattie Ellison was not unmindful of what was going on, but he knew the child better than she knew herself.

He had met her at several balls, and, although he had never danced himself since the death of his first love, he had been partly

pleased and partly pained to stand aside in some sheltering doorway to watch Flora.

He was pleased that she was so happy and so much admired, and to see her looking so lovely ; but he was pained to note how much all the admiration and flattery engrossed her, and to see how little part he himself had in her present life. Especially did he dislike the very decided flirtation which Flora was carrying on with handsome Jack Hartley. Wattie well knew that Jack was the kind of man who never meant anything serious by attentions to young ladies, and he was terribly afraid lest Flora should allow herself to get too fond of the handsome Lancer. He wondered that Juliet did not see and guard against the danger for her young sister-in-law ; but Juliet, although she zealously performed all the arduous duties of chaperone, was possibly too much

engrossed by her own troubles to notice very particularly how often Flora danced or sat out with one partner; and as long as the girl was well dressed and enjoying herself, she did not, perhaps, think her supervision over her need go further.

One evening, it was a day or two before the Eton and Harrow cricket-match, Juliet and Flora were together in a box at the Opera; for the moment no one was with them, and the curtain had gone down for the first act.

The house was crowded, and they were both looking down at the glittering *parterre* of stalls below them.

‘Look, Juliet, at that fat old woman in a pink silk turban—did you ever see such an object?’ said Flora, peering down through her opera-glasses. ‘Why, I do declare it’s old Mrs. Rollick! I never saw her come out

in that style before—and there is Arabella with her, in a low white tarlatan dress. Well, if I was thirty, with a scraggy neck and a couple of broomsticks for arms, I wouldn't appear in a low dress like that !' she added, with all the severity and disgust which the consciousness of undeniable youth and beauty can give.

' You are seventeen, and have pretty little plump shoulders,' said Juliet, smiling. ' If you are unmarried at thirty, and have grown scraggy——'

' *If!*' interrupted Flora, with a scornful little toss of her pretty chin.

Juliet laughed, and then sighed. She too had been looking eagerly down amongst the crowd below them—longing and yearning for a sight of Hugh Fleming.

Since that day when the truth about that old letter had been spoken between them, he

had not once been to her house, and she had only twice seen him, once in a crowded ball-room, and once out-of-doors. On both occasions merely a bow had passed between them.

She was perfectly conscious that he kept aloof from her purposely ; and although she fully appreciated his motives, and honoured him for them, and though she acknowledged the wisdom of his avoiding her for both their sakes, yet, womanlike, she could not help reproaching him, and fretted angrily against his desertion.

‘If he loved me more, he could not keep away,’ she said to herself, whereas in her heart she knew that it was the very greatness of his love that made him keep away.

‘There is Wattie,’ said Juliet, looking down through her opera-glasses.

‘Yes, I see,’ said Flora, as if she did not

care at all, although she had seen him a long time ago.

And presently Wattie came up into their box.

‘What is this about your going to Lord’s on Friday?’ he said, sitting down by Flora, with perhaps a little too much of the elder brother in his tone.

‘What about it?’ said Flora defiantly, scenting opposition before it came.

‘Why, I hear you are going on the drag of the 99th Lancers. I hope you won’t think of it, Flora,—and without your sister-in-law, too.’

‘Not think of it, indeed! As if I was going to give it up! Why on earth should I not go? I am going to be chaperoned by two married women, Mrs. Dalmaine and the Colonel’s wife. You talk as if I was going off all by myself on the sly. Juliet

has given me leave to go ; haven't you, Juliet ?'

' Given you leave to go where, Flora ? ' asked Juliet, rousing herself with an effort as the girl turned eagerly to her.

' I was objecting to Flora's going by herself to the cricket-match on the 99th drag, Mrs. Travers,' put in Wattie.

' Mrs. Dalmaine is going to take her ; I have been engaged myself long ago to go to Lady Caroline Skinflint's carriage, and I did not see how Flora was to go at all, so I was rather glad when she got such a pleasant invitation—how do you do, Lord George ? ' she added, turning to Lord George Mannersley, who at that moment entered the box and sat down beside her.

Flora turned triumphantly to Wattie.

' There ! ' she said, ' you see Juliet does not mind my going.'

‘But *I* do very much, Flora; if you will give it up to please me, I will take you myself.’

‘How?’ she said, temporising a little.

‘I will call for you in a hansom directly after lunch and take you up.’

‘After lunch! well, and when there what should we do?’

‘Why, walk about,’ said Wattie a little doubtfully, conscious possibly that this plan was hardly an equivalent for the 99th drag and the champagne luncheon.

‘Thank you, sir,’ said Flora, with a toss of her head, ‘I prefer my own arrangements.’

At that moment Captain Hartley came into the box.

‘I have just looked in, Miss Travers, in case I don’t see you before Friday, to say that I will call for you in my phaeton at ten

o'clock, if that is not too early. Mrs. Dalmaine will wait for you inside the gates—I have just seen her—will that suit you?'

'Oh, perfectly, thank you, Captain Hartley; it will be delightful!' cried Flora, with a little more *empressement* in her tone than if Wattie had not been standing behind her chair.

'Very well, then, let us settle it so. We have nothing to do now but hope for fine weather; and of course, Miss Travers, you will wear Eton colours?'

'I will see about that,' said Flora, who had a new pale-blue bonnet just come home from the milliner's on purpose.

Jack Hartley bent over her chair and whispered something to her which Wattie did not hear.

She looked down, smiled, fidgeted with

her fan, and then looked up with a sudden flash of her grey eyes into his.

‘Well, for *your* sake I will try,’ she said sentimentally.

Wattie ground his teeth together in a fury, whilst Captain Hartley, looking perhaps a little surprised at her manner, took his leave of both ladies.

‘Good night,’ said Wattie shortly, immediately after, and went out without shaking hands, with a face like a thunder-cloud.

And Flora pretended to listen to Patti, and felt a good deal elated by her small triumph, and a little bit sorry too.

What Jack Hartley had whispered to her had been very innocent indeed.

‘That dreadful Rollick woman and her daughter have just been asking me to give them lunch on our drag at Lord’s. I wish

you would tell them the wheels are rotten and will give way, or something alarming ; do try and keep them away,' was what he had said,—and Flora's words had answered him perfectly ; but her manner had been intended to make Wattie believe that something sentimental had been said about the Eton colours, for she did not forget that Wattie was a Harrow man.

Old or young, fair or plain, in their dealings with men who love them, women are at heart all the same. Only the different circumstances of their lives make the different shades of their character in this respect.

Down at Broadley House, among the horses and dogs, and under the shady walnut-trees on the lawn, no little maid had been more simple-hearted and more free from every shade of coquetry than was Flora Travers but up in London, courted, and

flattered, and sought after, she had already learnt all the thousand and one trickeries by which a woman exasperates an honest lover to the verge of despair, and often half breaks her own heart by the way. What can be the pleasure of it?

The natural feminine result of Miss Flora's naughtiness was that she lay awake crying all night ; and had Wattie only come again in the morning, she would have given up the cricket-match without a pang. But Wattie did not dream of coming.

Flora was in the depths of penitence—she would at all events do something to show her good intentions.

‘ Juliet,’ she said diplomatically, ‘ that bonnet is hideous ! I really cannot wear it to-morrow. I think I must change it.’

‘ I thought it suited you so well, Flora ; why should you want to change it ? ’

‘I have taken the greatest horror of it. I positively cannot bear the sight of it ! ’

‘You funny child ! I liked it so much ; but if you wish, we will take it back this afternoon.’

And when the two ladies reached the shop with the rejected bonnet, to Juliet’s astonishment, Flora insisted on having a dark blue one.

‘Changed your colours, Flora ! Why, what is that for ? ’

‘Light blue is horribly unbecoming to me,’ said Flora, blushing guiltily.

‘On the contrary, I think it is dark blue that does not suit you—but please yourself, child,’ said her sister-in-law, with a smile, becoming aware for the first time of some romance that was taking place in the girl’s life.

Flora was trying on a dark-blue bonnet.

It did not suit her—her complexion was too pale. She was perfectly conscious of the fact, but stuck to her resolution with the heroism of an early martyr.

‘He shall see that I can even make myself look a fright to please him,’ she thought, and aloud she said, ‘This one will do very well.’ The dark-blue bonnet was paid for and carried off, and Flora felt that she had given Wattie every reparation within her power. All day long she longed for him to come, or at least for a note from him. If only he would offer again to take her himself, how gladly she felt she would give up the glories of the 99th drag and the champagne lunch, to say nothing of Captain Hartley’s phaeton in the morning, to go with him humbly in a hansom! But Wattie made no sign, and Flora did not feel strong-minded enough to give up the expedition altogether.

Towards evening she grew angry and impatient with him again.

‘He is jealous, simply jealous,’ she said to herself. ‘Captain Hartley is much pleasanter, he never makes himself disagreeable for nothing. I shall certainly go now. Besides, it is too late to put him off. I almost wish I had not changed the bonnet.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISIT FROM A BRIDE.

ON a blazing morning, some four or five days before the London world thought it necessary to go mad in light and dark blue over the schoolboys' cricket-match, a heavily laden four-wheel cab might have been seen drawn up lazily in front of one of the stuccoed porticoes in Lower Eccleston Street.

On the top of the cab were two large dress boxes, a portmanteau, and a tin box, all marked very strikingly with the letter L in red and white paint. Out of the cab there emerged, when the cabman opened the door, first, a small bird-cage containing a canary,

secondly, a larger ditto containing a grey parrot, thirdly, a wickerwork dog-kennel containing a Maltese poodle—which latter animal enlivened the noonday tranquillity of the street by uttering sundry dismal and jackal-like howls as soon as he was deposited on the pavement.

After the live stock, were handed out a lady's dressing-case, a gentleman's dressing-bag, a bundle of umbrellas, and a rug; and then came a middle-aged female in a rusty black silk dress, and with a severe cast of countenance, who proceeded to hand out a shapeless bundle of muslin flounces and blue ribbons, who descended cautiously to the ground and looked timidly around her.

'It's very trying for a bride to come home all alone like this, isn't it, Dorcas? And to think of its being broad daylight too

with everybody to stare at me in the open street.'

'What is the heye of man?' said the female addressed, sternly fixing her own on the only male observer of the proceedings, a one-legged crossing-sweeper at the corner, who was idly wondering if so many packages would mean 'a job;' 'the heye of man signifies little, marm; reflect upon the judgment-day when all our sins will be revealed.' And it was with those cheerful words sounding in her ears that Mrs. Lamp-lough passed the threshold of her new home.

Mrs. Blair had not allowed many days to elapse after her stormy interview with her stepdaughter before securing to herself, by all the strength of marriage bonds, the various good things which she imagined

would fall to her lot as the lawful wife of the Rev. Daniel Lamplough.

No sooner had Juliet virtually ejected her from Sotherne than she became possessed with a mortal terror lest her lover, who was now her only refuge, should slip through her fingers also, and she be left destitute and homeless.

With many blushes and much simpering shyness she communicated to her dearest Daniel her wish to be married soon—sooner than she had originally intended—so very soon, indeed, that even that worthy man, who was not troubled with many bashful sentiments, was a little bit surprised.

She was never well at Sotherne in the summer, she said. She wanted an immediate change of air—it fretted her to think she was keeping her Daniel away from his parish and his poor people, who must miss

his ministrations so sorely ; it would be nice, too, to be married quietly, without any fuss ; indeed, in her delicate position, it would be more seemly ; and then, they would get a little glimpse of the world before the London season was quite over ; and as to her clothes, why, she really wanted very little, and could get everything much better in town after she was married.

Mr. Lamplough was only too pleased at the turn which his courtship was thus suddenly taking. Truth to say, he was getting very tired of the love-making ; the lady once secured, he was anxious to get back to his ordinary life, and was thoroughly sick of winding Mrs. Blair's wools and carrying her shawls, and of making her pretty speeches all day long. It was time, he considered, that all these follies should come to an end. A certain amount of philandering he had

always known to be requisite and desirable on these occasions, but he was beginning to think that he had had pretty well enough of it, so that he hailed with joy this sudden fancy of hers to be married in a week, and congratulated himself on having found a woman who was sensible enough to forego the extravagant delights of a large trousseau, and who did not mind walking into church arm in arm with him, without a wedding party and without a wedding breakfast.

‘My Maria,’ he said, with that ineffable sweetness which always characterised his language to the lady of his affections, ‘you are the fairest ornament of your sex; your goodness and your solicitude for my happiness positively overwhelm me!’ and then he hummed and hawed, and said something about the settlements.

As to that, Mrs. Blair said it would be all

very easily arranged. She would send for Mr. Bruce, who had always managed her affairs, and he would come down and settle everything, and if Mr. Lamplough would write any directions he might wish to give to him, she would do the same, and he would bring down the necessary documents with him all ready to be signed, so that there need be no delay on that score. And then she added tenderly,

‘And you know, Daniel, that everything I have is yours.’

And Mr. Lamplough murmured ‘My angel!’ with a fondness which was not altogether assumed, considering the circumstances.

But whether it was by accident or by design, certain it is that Mr. Bruce’s letter to the bridegroom elect did not give him the least idea of the true state of the case. In

all probability Mr. Bruce imagined that the amount of Mrs. Blair's fortune was known to him ; at any rate, it was only when the family solicitor arrived at Sotherne with the settlements all drawn out in his pocket, the very afternoon before the wedding-day, that Mr. Lamplough found out, to his horror and dismay, that his 'rich widow,' as he had always fondly imagined her to be, possessed three thousand pounds of her own, and five hundred pounds per annum settled upon her for her lifetime,—which upon her death lapsed again to the Sotherne estate, upon which it was chargeable.

Certainly Mrs. Blair had done her utmost for her lover, for her own three thousand pounds were to be settled absolutely upon him. He could find no fault with her ; to the best of her power, she had behaved fairly, and even generously, to him ; she had

not cheated him nor lied unto him, she had never told him she was rich, nor misled him concerning her fortune in any way. It was entirely from the gossip of other people, from the style in which she lived, and from his own misguided suppositions, that this fatal misconception had arisen.

And it was now too late. Mr. Lamplough had no overweening sense of honour, neither was he a man of any refinement of feeling; but to cast off a lady on the very eve of his marriage-day, because she had not so much money as he had imagined her to have, was a thing which even he felt to be an impossibility.

So Mr. and Mrs. Lamplough were duly married at Sotherne Church the following morning, and the only change in their programme was, that, instead of a week's honeymoon, two days at the Red Lion at

Henley, on their way to London, was all that Mr. Lamplough considered necessary under the altered circumstances of his mariage.

Some days before the wedding there arrived from London, as lady's-maid to the bride, a stern-looking middle-aged woman, Mrs. Dorcas Mullins by name. She was engaged and sent down by Miss Lamplough, the Rev. Daniel's maiden sister, with a first-rate character; indeed, she was well known to her, having already lived with several members of the Lamplough family.

Mrs. Blair did not fancy the austere and puritanical aspect of the waiting-maid her future sister-in-law had chosen for her; but Mr. Lamplough having stated that she was a God-fearing woman, and came of a pious family, and further that it was his very particular wish that his dearest Maria should

engage her, she did not venture to make any more objections to her.

Dorcas was undoubtedly a good servant and understood her duties, so that Mrs. Blair could find no reasonable fault with her, but she felt vaguely that her new maid was a spy upon her actions, and that Mr. Lamplough had chosen her to be a sort of gaoler over her. When the bride and bridegroom arrived at Paddington Station from Henley, Mr. Lamplough said to his wife:

‘My love, will you go home with Dorcas? —I have a little business to do in the City, and shall be with you during the course of the afternoon.’

His smooth-toned, gentle words left no room for rebellion. Mrs. Lamplough felt it hard to be left to go to her new home alone, but already she had learnt that she was no longer a free agent, and that her husband

was not a man whom she could dare to disobey, even concerning the smallest trifle.

So, accompanied only by her sour-faced scripture-quoting maid—a sad change from the voluble, worldly little Ernestine, whom her mistress already bitterly regretted—the three-days' wife arrived, as has been seen, at the unknown house of her new husband.

No. 160 Lower Eccleston Street was a large and well-built corner house, but when you went into it you felt much as if you were entering a family vault. Heavy mahogany furniture, black with age, faded flock papers of antediluvian designs, dingy threadbare carpets, and curtains out of which the sun had long ago taken every vestige of their original colour, and reduced them in every room to a uniform rusty hue; a great gaunt drawing-room, from whose misty ceiling depended a monstrous and hideous

chandelier done up in a yellow muslin bag ; old-fashioned console tables with white marble tops surmounted by mirrors, whose gilt frames of scrolled and floriated designs were also swathed in yellow muslin ; a large round table in the middle of the front drawing-room, another a size smaller in the middle of the back drawing-room, with red Utrecht velvet covers on each of them ; a few hard straight-backed sofas and chairs, all in red Utrecht also, scattered at wide intervals over the room ; a white alabaster clock, with a blackened ormolu cupid on the top of it, on the mantelpiece, flanked on either side by two large and extremely hideous cut-glass lustres, completed the decoration of this cheerful apartment. The rest of the house was in the same style. All was good indeed, but heavy, ponderous, and frightful. There was not a little table, nor a light chair, nor a

scrap of prettiness, from the cellar to the garret.

Poor Mrs. Lamplough, who had been accustomed to all the feminine knicknacks of the day in the pretty rooms at Sotherne, looked about her in dismay. Something must of course be done to improve all this ; everything ugly must be swept away, and all sorts of new-fashioned things must be substituted—but meanwhile how depressing, how appalling, was the present state of things !

When Mr. Lamplough came home he found the furniture in the drawing-room all dragged about from one side of the room to the other, the yellow muslin torn off the chandelier and the gilt frames of the mirrors, and his wife standing in the midst of the confusion jotting down sundry items with a pencil and paper.

The reverend gentleman stopped in amazement in the doorway.

'My love, what *are* you doing? Are you pushing up the furniture for a carpet dance, or are you taking an inventory to let the house?'

'Neither,' she answered, a little sharply; 'I am only putting down what things I shall want to make this room decently habitable, and what old rubbish must be sold.'

'New things!' said Mr. Lamplough, with a little short laugh. 'I don't quite know, my dearest Maria, where the new things are to come from. I shall not provide the money for any new thing: do you feel inclined to do so?' It was the first time he had alluded to the lack of money which he so sorely repented in his bride, and, possibly feeling not altogether guiltless of deception

in the matter, Mrs. Lamplough bit her lip and was silent.

‘Here, Florizella!’ he exclaimed, addressing somebody behind him, and for the first time Mrs. Lamplough discovered that he had not come in alone. A great puffing and panting was heard on the last steps of the staircase and in the landing outside, and the individual addressed as ‘Florizella’ waddled, I cannot say walked, into the room.

A short woman, little more than four feet high, and very nearly as broad as she was tall, a very fat red face, and fierce-looking little brown curls which stuck out stiffly from under a salmon-coloured bonnet, very large hands arrayed in grey cotton gloves, and very large feet in black cloth boots that stuck out conspicuously from under her short green silk gown—such was the outer appearance of the woman who answered to the

poetical name of Florizella, suggestive of shepherdesses and flowery meads and all sorts of summer blossoms.

‘Here, Florizella !’ cried her brother, ‘here is Mrs. Lamplough talking of selling my furniture already !’

‘Selling the furniture !’ repeated Miss Florizella in dismay, in the cracked wheezy voice which extreme obesity and constant attacks of asthma had made habitual to her. ‘Selling *my mother’s* furniture ! gracious heavens !’ and from the sour expression in Miss Lamplough’s face it did not appear that she was likely to be over-affectionate to her new sister-in-law.

But Mrs. Lamplough did not intend to let herself be snubbed by her new relative. She laid down her pencil and advanced to meet her. ‘I suppose this is your sister, Daniel,’ she said, ‘although you have not introduced

her to me. You find me all in confusion, my dear Florizella ; it would have been better to have deferred your visit a little ; still, I am very pleased to see you.'

Miss Lamplough submitted to be kissed with a sulky grunt, and offensively repeated some remark concerning her mother's furniture, and what was wrong with it.

'Oh, as to the furniture,' said Mrs. Lamplough with a very sweet smile, 'of course, if dear Daniel values it for his mother's sake, I should not dream of selling any of it ; but you must confess that it is very ugly, and in the worst possible taste. But perhaps we could not expect any great refinement from her, poor woman, could we ?'

Now, the late Mrs. Lamplough had, at an early period of her career, been engaged in the useful but homely occupation of dispensing butter and eggs behind the counter

in her husband's shop in Southampton Row, and Miss Lamplough, who was always painfully alive to the humiliating fact, felt the sting of the allusion and was silenced.

Mr. Lamplough, who had been listening to the little passage of arms between the ladies of his family with an amused smile, not altogether displeased to find that his elegant wife had the best of it, here called out to Dorcas, who happened to be passing upstairs, to send the housemaid into the drawing-room to move the furniture back into its place again, and to replace the yellow muslin bag on the chandelier.

And thus ended Mrs. Lamplough's fruitless attempt at beautifying and reforming her new home.

It so happened that Juliet Travers did not go to the cricket-match at all. After Flora had gone off in high and somewhat

artificial spirits in Captain Hartley's phaeton, Juliet had received a note from Lady Caroline Skinflint announcing her inability to go in consequence of a bad sick-headache, so she resigned herself not at all unwillingly to a quiet day alone.

Great was her astonishment when, early in the afternoon, a visitor was announced—none other than Mrs. Lamplough.

Mrs. Lamplough, arrayed in lace and satin and gorgeous apparel, and a wonderful Parisian bonnet, came towards her with outstretched lavender-kid hands, and with the most delighted and *empressé* manner, as if nothing unpleasant had ever passed between them.

' My dearest Juliet ! how fortunate I am to find you alone, and how nice to think of having a chat with you, my dear girl ! I knew you would not wish me to stand upon

ceremony with you ; of course, being a bride,' with a little affected giggle, 'I ought, I suppose, to have waited for you to have called upon me first, but between you and me, dearest, I felt that there could be no such formalities, and I was so very anxious to see you ;' and she took hold of Juliet's hands and made as if she would have kissed her.

Juliet had half risen from her chair, and looked and listened to her stepmother in positive amazement.

It passed through her mind to wonder at the various phases of human nature which were constantly presenting themselves to her. What could this woman be made of to be smiling and fawning upon her, and calling her by loving names, as if the memory of their last interview were wholly wiped out of her mind ?

Could she be neither a sincere friend nor

even an honest enemy? The straightforwardness of her own nature revolted against the duplicity of the other.

She drew back a little coldly from the proffered embrace.

‘I am surprised, I confess,’ she said, with hesitation. ‘I did not think—I did not imagine that after our last interview——’

‘Ah, my dear, but I am not one that can bear malice,’ exclaimed her visitor with easy self-possession, sinking down into the cushiony depths of an easy chair. ‘You know that I was always warm-hearted ; my feelings always carry me away ; my sensibility, as I often say, is a snare to me, a positive snare ; often, where prudence would keep me back, my heart, Juliet, carries me forward with a glow of enthusiasm. I positively *cannot* keep up a little quarrel with anyone I love —to forgive and forget is ever my motto.’

‘There are some offences so deep, Mrs. Lamplough,’ answered Juliet, sternly, ‘that it must be a matter of years to forgive them, and to forget them is perhaps impossible.’

And then Mrs. Lamplough was silent for a minute, looking keenly at her. Juliet was standing with her face turned slightly away from her, and her eyes bent down upon the pages of a book upon the table with which her slender fingers were trifling.

Through Mrs. Lamplough’s mind there passed a rapid deliberation as to what was the best course for her to pursue. Here was a woman with whom it behoved her at all risks to keep on good terms; her own position in London society depended in a great measure upon her stepdaughter. She was bent upon entering into fashionable society, and Juliet’s house was the threshold and stepping-stone by which alone she knew how to attain that

coveted paradise. Time enough to cast her off and to quarrel with her by and by, when she had made good her own footing within the charmed circle ; but for the present, for the next year probably, Juliet's goodwill and Juliet's invitations and introductions were an absolute necessity to her existence.

She had hoped to have established herself upon her old footing with her stepdaughter by a few affectionate words and caresses ; it would have been much pleasanter and much easier to have ignored the stormy words that had passed between them, and to have avoided all reference to disagreeable subjects. But as Juliet did not seem disposed to let things slide into such easy grooves, there were other means at her disposal which she must perforce employ.

' Why are you so vindictive to me, Juliet,' she said, looking fixedly at her step-

daughter. ‘I really cannot see what you are to gain by making an enemy of me.’

‘An enemy!’ repeated Juliet, turning round upon her with a heightened colour, ‘I would far rather have an open enemy than a false friend.’

‘Fie, fie, Juliet!’ putting up both her hands in front of her face; ‘what ugly words to apply to me! My dear, how can you think I should wish to be anything but most fond of you? It is true that circumstances have perhaps given me more knowledge of the details of your life——’

‘Use your knowledge,’ broke in Juliet passionately, ‘do your worst; I defy you to harm me.’

‘Well, I *might* do you a great deal of harm, Juliet,’ answered Mrs. Lamplough, with a glitter in her blue eyes that was almost a threat. ‘I might of course take

away your character—it does not take much to do *that* for a fellow woman nowadays, if one has the inclination; but, my dear, why should you imagine that I wish to do so? Depend upon it, Juliet, your happiest and best plan is to give me a kiss and let bygones be bygones, and we will say no more about it. Of course, you believe that I did you a very unkind turn in stopping that letter—well, I am sorry for it; but there is no real harm done; you are married, and rich, and sought after, and your husband does not bother you. Why should he or anyone else ever know that the Colonel Fleming who comes to your house now is an old lover for whom you are hankering? Will such knowledge improve your position or your happiness?

Juliet did not answer, bitterly feeling the truth of her words, and forced to acknow-

ledge that it would be indeed best for her to be friends with this woman who held her secret so cruelly in her power ; and yet an outraged turmoil of pride and anger kept her silent.

Mrs. Lamplough looked at her for a few minutes, watching the effect of her words, and then she said with a little laugh :

‘ If you are so obstinately silent, I shall begin to think that I am indeed in the way this afternoon ; possibly, as you are alone to-day, you are expecting a favoured visitor, or perhaps, like the lovers in the French plays, he fled at my inopportune entrance, and is hidden behind the window-curtains.’

The gnat-bite answered where the open stab had failed. Juliet turned round to her like a wounded creature.

‘ For heaven’s sake,’ she cried, ‘ spare me such cruel pleasantries. My life is as innocent as yours, and you know it ; and if my

heart is guilty, you know better than anyone how far more sinned against than sinning I am. Say nothing more about this subject to me, I entreat you; it is an insult to me to allude to it, and—perhaps you are right—let us be friends; it will be better, possibly, for us all.'

'Ah, there is my own dear girl!' cried Mrs. Lamplough, with an easy return to her usual gushing manner. 'I knew you would be sensible and let this little cloud blow over, and leave us nothing but fair blue skies. Come, sit down beside me, and give me a kiss, dearest.'

She drew her stepdaughter down into a seat close to her, and kissed her impassive cheek with a sort of clinging rapture that almost made Juliet shudder. 'As if I ever could believe any naughty bad things of you, my dear girl! Pray don't imagine me to be

such an unkind creature, I who am so fond of you. And now we will say no more about it ever again ; let us talk of something else.'

With an effort Juliet roused herself to talk of ordinary topics—to ask her when she had come to town, how she liked her new home and her new life—and by degrees, as the bride's new hopes and aims and ambitions became revealed to her, Juliet began to understand what was to be her part of the contract of peace between them, and what was the price she was expected to pay in order to insure her silence upon the one subject on which alone she was vulnerable—numberless invitations to her own house, and introductions to the houses of her friends. It would be a bore of course, but Juliet was cheerfully prepared to do her best ; and she could not help admiring the skilful cunning

which had enabled her stepmother to turn everything so satisfactorily to her own ends, and to make use of her so cleverly as a stepping-stone to attain her own objects and desires.

CHAPTER VII.

WATTIE ELLISON DECLINES AN INVITATION.

FLORA TRAVERS sat on the box seat of the 99th drag at the Eton and Harrow match.

The sun beat down fiercely upon the bright scene—upon the crowds of carriages, the sea of faces, the dazzling masses of pale and dark blue, which encircled the smooth open green sward in the middle, where every eye was fixed eagerly upon a handful of slender boys in white flannel.

I know not a more characteristically English scene than this same great annual cricket-match. In no other nation of Europe could such an intense excitement be created by so small a cause.

Merely a game between a few schoolboys ! Yet it is a thing of national interest. There is not a heart in all that vast assembly that does not beat with intense apprehension as to the final result of that two days' game, from the grey-haired statesman who remembers his own Eton days, and proudly watches his slight grandson fielding among the light blue Eleven, down to the fat-cheeked ten-year-old Harrow boy in the lowest form in the school, who sits among his schoolfellows, hallooing and shouting he hardly knows at what.

And the ladies, bless them, are as eager as the men ! Have they not all of them brothers, cousins, sons, or grandsons, in one or other of the two great schools ? and if these are wanting, the lover possibly was a 'Harrow man,' or at all events they have a pair or so of gloves on the result, enough to give to one and all a feeling of enthusiastic partisanship.

No game is to the uninitiated so uninteresting to watch as cricket ; yet all this great mixed multitude, three-fourths of whom hardly know swift from slow bowling, and have not the remotest idea what is meant by longstop or short slip, sit out here for hours and hours in the shadeless sunshine, watching every ball in breathless and almost in silent suspense, as if their very lives depended on it.

Flora Travers sits on the box seat of the 99th drag in her dark-blue bonnet and white muslin dress, with a plate of cold salmon on her lap and a glass of champagne in her hand. Captain Hartley is on one side of her, and another gallant Lancer clinging on between earth and heaven, one foot on the wheel and one on some step midway, stands on the other side of her helping her to salad. Flora looks and laughs from one to the other,

utters her little sallies, dimples over with pretty little smiles, registers her little bets, and looks and is supremely happy.

Every thought of Wattie and his displeasure has gone out of her head. It is very delightful to be where she is; Captain Hartley is devoted to her; she is conscious of being well-dressed in spite of the dark-blue bonnet; the sunshine is bright, the scene is all new to her, and she is seventeen! What more can she want? The young are very philosophical, the passing hour is of more value to them than the look-out of their whole lives.

And then, in the very middle of it all, just as the day was nearly over—when in half an hour six o'clock would be struck on the big clock across the ground, and the wickets would be drawn—just as she was laughing her gayest and looking her brightest and

happiest, down in the moving crowd below she catches sight of Wattie's face looking up at her, stern and displeased.

She half rose from her seat and made a little gesture to beckon him to her, but he only lifted his hat distantly and coldly, and passed on and was lost among the sea of black coats.

And all at once the sunshine and the brightness and all the freshness seemed to have gone out of everything, and nothing seemed pleasant or happy to her any longer.

When she reached home an hour later, Juliet met her at the door.

'Well, dear, have you had a pleasant day? have you enjoyed it?' she asked of her young sister-in-law. But Flora answered her dejectedly and wearily.

'Oh yes, I suppose so; it was very hot,

and I am dreadfully tired ;' and she passed languidly upstairs.

'It was a delightful day, Juliet !' cried Mrs. Dalmaine, who had come home with her. ' You poor dear, not to have gone at all ! There was Lord George wandering about in misery, looking for you. He had to come and console himself with me. Such lots of people ; and such a splendid lunch we had ! And there is no doubt about it that Jack Hartley is quite struck by your Flora ; you may take my word for it, that will be a match !'

With all Mrs. Dalmaine's flirting propensities, she always took a true woman's interest in the making up of a match.

A marriage, she was in the habit of saying, often spoilt a man, but generally made a woman ; and any addition to the sacred sisterhood of 'frisky matrons' was hailed by

her as a benefit to the community at large. She looked upon Flora as a very hopeful sort of young woman—‘really, you know, not bad for a girl,’ she would say—and she would have been genuinely pleased to see her married to someone in her own set.

With all her faults, Rosa Dalmaine never grudged a younger and prettier woman her triumphs. She had suffered too much herself from the spiteful and envious tongues of other women to be anything but generous to a possible rival.

Mrs. Dalmaine had long ago forgotten Juliet for disappointing her about the water party to Maidenhead, but she had not forgotten her friend’s promise of a dinner at Hurlingham to make up for it.

The day was now fixed for this dinner, and the invitations were sent out. Cis pro-

mised Juliet that he would go, and Captain Hartley was of course among those invited.

‘Would you mind very much asking one more, Juliet?’ Flora said to her sister-in-law with a trembling voice, coming up and standing nervously behind her chair.

‘And whom do you want me to ask, Flora?’

‘Wattie,’ answered the girl, with a deep blush. Juliet turned round and looked up at her for a moment.

‘If you think you can manage to keep all your lovers in order, my dear,’ she said, laughing, ‘I will ask him by all means.’

‘Oh, thank you, Juliet dear!’ cried Flora with alacrity, and in her own mind she determined to show Wattie once for all how mistaken he was in being so jealous, by snubbing Captain Hartley and being everything that was gracious to himself. It

should go hard with her, she thought, if she did not manage somehow to reinstate herself in his good graces during that evening.

The following morning the answer to Juliet's invitation lay on the breakfast-table. Flora, who was down first, recognised the handwriting of the note, but would not seem to notice it; she busied herself with teasing the kitten and putting lumps of sugar into the canary's cage, and would not even look round when Juliet came in and began opening her letters.

'Pretty dickey—pretty dick!' said Flora, standing in front of the cage stuffing her fingers through the bars, to the no small alarm of its fluttering and tweaking occupant. 'Pretty little dickey!' and all the time her heart was beating and thumping so that she could hardly breathe.

'I am so sorry Wattie can't come on

Tuesday, Flora !' broke in Juliet's voice from the breakfast table.

'Pretty dickey !' said Flora again, but this time in a fainter voice, and her heart seemed to stop altogether for an instant, and then she stood quite still, staring into the cage for a minute or two before she spoke.

'Oh, can't he ? Well, I dare say we shall be very happy without him.' And then she sat down to the table and helped herself rather largely to curried eggs.

Juliet had thrown the note carelessly across the table to her, and presently she took it up and read it—merely a formal answer—he was very sorry to be unable to accept Mrs. Travers's kind invitation—that was all ; he did not even plead another engagement !

'I suppose you don't want to keep it,' she said, and then solaced her angry feelings

by tearing it up viciously into very small pieces.

When the morning of the dinner arrived, Cis said to his wife after breakfast—

‘I am afraid I shan’t be able to go with you to Hurlingham, Juliet.’

‘Not go, Cis? Why, you promised me that you would, and I think it will be hardly civil to our guests if you do not,’ said Juliet in some dismay.

‘I am very sorry,’ he answered, looking down and shuffling his feet nervously up and down the hearth-rug. ‘Of course I meant to go—but the fact is, I have had a letter from home—my father is not very well—nothing to speak of, of course, but I think he wants to see me, and in short I think I had better run down to-day, and I know you can do very well without me.’

Juliet looked into her husband’s face, and

something in its weak irresolute lines told her that he was not speaking the truth to her.

‘Oh, very well,’ she answered coldly and contemptuously ; ‘please yourself, of course.’

Cis kissed her with some effusion, feeling rather thankful to be let off so easily, but Juliet shrank involuntarily from the conjugal salute.

‘There, that will do ; there is nothing to kiss me about ; I suppose there is no occasion to say anything to Flora about your father’s indisposition !’ with a ring of scorn in the last words.

‘Oh dear no, certainly not !’ said Cis airily, and went his way into his study ; and having carefully shut the door, he drew out of his pocket and proceeded to read over a small note written in cramped foreign-looking characters.

‘Will you come and see me to-morrow as

early as you can,' ran this note. 'I have an idle morning and a great deal to talk to you about—in fact, I want your advice and counsel upon a most important matter—you never have anything to do, so I know you will come if you can; and perhaps you will take me out to Hampstead, where I am due at three o'clock to play at a charity concert. I will make you benefit the charitable purposes of it by taking a ticket and listening to my performances.

'Yours sincerely,

'GRETCHEN.'

Half-an-hour later, Cis Travers had put himself into a hansom and was bowling swiftly westwards towards Gretchen Rudenbach's little suburban villa.

'So Mr. Travers has thrown your dinner over!' said Mrs. Dalmaine, as the two

friends were driving down together that afternoon to Hurlingham in the victoria, Flora having gone on with some other members of their party.

‘Yes, he has gone down to Broadley,’ answered Juliet, putting a good face upon her husband’s defection ; ‘his father was not very well, and he thought he ought to go. It is tiresome, of course, but——’

‘But neither you nor I ever thought he meant to come !’ interrupted her friend with a laugh.

‘I don’t know why you should say so !’ said Juliet, a little nettled. ‘Cis had every intention of going last night ; I assure you it was only this morning, when the letter came from his father, that he thought it right to go down.’

Mrs. Dalmaine threw back her pretty little blonde head, and burst out laughing.

‘My poor Juliet! and you don’t mean to say you believe that story? How wonderfully easily some wives are duped!’

‘What do you mean, Rosa? You do not, surely, think——’

‘I do most surely think that, having been up to lunch to-day with my old aunt, who lives at the back of the Zoological Gardens, as I came southwards in a hansom I encountered your husband coming up northwards, also in a hansom, with——’

‘Ah, for heaven’s sake don’t say it!’ cried poor Juliet, clutching hold of her arm; but Rosa Dalmaine was relentless.

‘Why do you get so upset about things, my dear? You had much better know who it was—it was that little German pianiste with the big innocent eyes, who played at your musical party.’

And then Juliet leant back in the carriage

with a very white face, and did not speak another word during the rest of the drive.

It was not jealousy—she did not love her husband well enough to be jealous—it was the shame of it that she felt so acutely.

That he should stoop to deceive her, to invent paltry lies to mislead her, that he should put it into the power of others to twit her with his desertion and his double dealing, made him appear so utterly contemptible in her eyes, that every shadow of affection and respect that lingered in her heart towards him died away out of it from that very minute. What duty, she asked herself bitterly, does a wife owe to a husband who has thus lost all claim to her respect? What meaning, what binding power is there in those old vows to ‘love and to honour,’ where it has become impossible for her to do either? Poor storm-tossed, well-nigh despairing

woman! Only the temptation seemed now wanting to complete her most utter loss. And even that was not far off.

About an hour later on that same afternoon it so happened that Colonel Fleming was standing idly lighting his cigar on the steps outside his club, listening with half-attention to some old Indian reminiscences which Major-General Chutney was volubly pouring into his ear, when a phaeton and a showy pair of high-stepping cobs pulled up at the door, and Hugh recognised with a nod his cousin, that lord of whom mention has before been made in these pages.

‘My dear Hugh!’ cried this august personage, ‘delighted to see you! I came after another fellow, but you’ll do much better—come, jump up here; I’ve got a few men to dinner at Hurlingham this evening—will you join us? Jump up, and I’ll drive

you down. The man who was going with me has lost his grandmother, or his uncle, or somebody, and just sent to say he can't go—and it is so dull, driving alone; and by Jove, I'd rather have your company than anyone else's; so jump up.'

'Thanks,' answered Hugh, with no great eagerness, 'you are very kind, but I don't think Hurlingham dinners are much in my line. I have been so long away, you know, It's very kind, all the same, of you——'

'Kind, be ——!' exclaimed his lordship with good-tempered heartiness. 'Don't stand making speeches to me. What's the good of a cousin if he can't take a short notice and come and dine with one in a friendly way! I really want your company, man; so make no more fuss about it, but jump up, and don't keep these fidgeting brutes waiting any longer.'

‘Oh, if you put it in that way, of course I shall be delighted,’ said Hugh, and straightway mounted into the phaeton, and, nodding farewell to the little General, was driven off.

Major-General Chutney, who knew the great man well by sight, gazed after them with admiring awe.

‘How pleased Mrs. Chutney will be to hear about it!’ he reflected, rubbing his hands together; ‘called him “Hugh,” too, as chummy as possible, and off they drove like a couple of brothers! Mrs. Chutney will like to hear about it; she was so angry with her sister the other day for saying she didn’t believe his cousin the lord ever noticed him. It will be quite a little triumph for Mrs. Chutney, quite—she’ll want to ask him to dinner at once, I believe.’

So it was that Fate brought these two, Juliet Travers and Hugh Fleming, together once more that day.

There is no pleasanter, sweeter spot in and about all our dusty, toiling capital than that cool, green, river-side Club, that has of late years taken so important a place in London's yearly gaieties. The afternoon sunshine comes slantingly down upon the somewhat weather-beaten façade of the old-fashioned house, that has no pretensions to architectural beauty, yet has a certain old-world dignity which gives it a quiet charm of its own. On the smooth green lawn before it are spread out numberless little tables with snowy cloths, where tea and strawberries are being rapidly consumed by the gay, chattering crowd, in many-coloured butterfly garments. Further on is a background of green—the shaded meadow, with glimpses of the white shining river beyond it through the gaps in the chestnut-trees; whilst the faint popping of the guns beyond the garden

hardly detracts from the rurality of the scene.

English people have few out-door recreations, yet there is hardly a nation in Europe that values and appreciates so well the few it has.

By-and-bye the crowd disperses, carriages drive off, and the gardens are deserted. Two parties remaining to dine are alone left in the big empty house and its grounds.

‘There is another dinner-party in the next room,’ whispered Flora to her sister-in-law, as they went into the house; ‘I wonder who they are.’

‘Only some men, I think; I hope they won’t be very noisy,’ answered Juliet carelessly.

The dinner was long and hot, and, as far as Juliet was concerned, interminably wearisome.

It struck her for the first time, too, that Flora was talking to Captain Hartley with an eagerness and an excitement that were hardly natural to her, and that Captain Hartley was drinking a good deal of champagne, and seemed to be drawing her on into a more marked and noticeable flirtation than she quite approved of. She began to feel sorry that he had been invited, and to hope that no harm would come of it.

Rosa Dalmaine, too, was full of life and vivacity, and kept the talk going with untiring energy ; the other two ladies of the party also seemed full of enjoyment, and to be equally delighted with themselves and the men who sat on either side of them.

Only Juliet herself felt dull and spiritless and weary—her head ached, and talking was an effort to her. She longed to be alone, to think out the miserable story of her husband's

duplicity, which saddened and revolted her even more than his supposed infidelity could do.

She was very thankful when someone proposed leaving the hot dinner room and adjourning to the gardens. The long windows were thrown open, and in a few minutes the whole party had gladly dispersed itself out of doors.

Wrapping her shawl hastily round her, Juliet fled alone into the darkened summer night. The perfect silence and solitude, succeeding to the noisy clatter of the dinner-table, were a relief to her ; the cool night-breezes fanned her heated brow ; heavily scented lime-trees, and rich clusters of cream and crimson roses, filled the air with a thousand subtle perfumes, and seemed to calm and soothe the turmoil in her heart .

Presently she came to the river—it sped

along swiftly, but silently—a wide white flood in the silver moonlight.

She walked slowly, her arms folded upon her bosom, her head bent downwards, her long silk draperies trailing heavily upon the gravel walk behind her.

And, all at once, just where a bright gleam of summer moonshine broke through an opening in the dark trees, someone stood in front of her, and called her by her name.

‘ Juliet, is that you ? ’

She stood still, and looked up.

Hugh Fleming stood before her

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE RIVER.

‘YES, it is I,’ she answered. ‘How did you come here; I did not know you were here: were you dining in the next room to us?’

He drew her into the deep shade of the trees before he answered her.

‘Yes, I was dining with my cousin; he asked me this afternoon. I did not want to come, but he made such a point of it that I could not well refuse. Believe me, had I known that you were to be here, I would not have come.’

‘How many apologies, Hugh, for the misfortune of meeting me!’ she said, not

reproachfully nor bitterly, but very, very sadly.

He did not answer.

They stood together, those two, in the utter silence of the night, alone, and yet apart; they were side by side, yet she did not even look at him; the dark trees threw their sheltering shadows about them, the wide river flowed on at their feet. Against its white, hazy flood, Juliet's tall, dark figure stood out clear and distinct; he could see every line of the delicate profile turned away from him, every fluttering lock of her soft hair, that the light breeze had ruffled upon her brow, and the slender white fingers clasped listlessly together, that shone out like ivory against her dark dress.

‘Shall I go? would you like me to go?’
she asked, very gently, turning to him and holding out her hand.

He took the hand, but held it fast.

'No, as we have met let me say good-bye to you here. I must have seen you once again.'

'Good-bye?' she asked falteringly.

'Yes, good-bye. I have made up my mind to go back to India as soon as I possibly can; until then I shall leave town and go into the country, to Paris perhaps, anywhere away from London and from you; it is better so, believe me.'

Back upon her memory there came that scene at Sotheorne, long years ago, when once before he had told her he was going to leave her: the darkened room, the flickering fire-light—his words so nearly the same as those he was speaking now—the faint sickness at her heart, and then her own mad words of despair.

Are things perpetually thus repeated and

reproduced in this world in an ever-revolving circle? she wondered vaguely with a dull, aching wonder that was hardly pain.

‘I am much stronger than I was,’ he continued, in an unmovedly calm voice. ‘My doctor tells me there is no reason why I should stay in England longer than I like. I cannot well sail before the end of October or the beginning of November, but meanwhile, I have one or two invitations to Scotland, and an uncle in the south who would like to see me before I go back, and I can always spend a week or two in Paris with an old friend. I mean to leave town next week, and should have called to wish you good-bye in a day or two; but, as we have met, let us say good-bye here; it will be better, don’t you think so?’

But Juliet stood still, with head low

bowed upon her bosom, and answered him not.

‘ You know very well how bitter it is to me to leave you,’ he went on after a few moments in a lower voice, and clasping the hand that he held tighter within his own. ‘ But you know also that there is no other course left for me, after—after what has happened. As long as I am here you can have no rest, no peace, my poor child—but when I am gone, and you are no longer in daily dread of coming across me, you will be able to take an interest once more in your ordinary duties and occupations—the memory of much that is now painful to you will become softened and dimmed by time and absence, and you will grow reconciled to that life which my unfortunate presence has for a while troubled.’

Then all at once the flood-gates of her

heart were opened, and she burst into a wild and passionate cry :

‘My life! What is my life? What have I to live for? What one single thing have I in this world to make me love it? Hugh, my love, my darling—do not leave me, for pity’s sake, do not leave me again—I cannot live without you—take me with you—take me with you.’

Her arms were round his neck, her warm breath, her passionate words in his ear, her heaving bosom upon his heart. With a smothered cry, he clasped her there, tightly, despairingly, and showered down mad, hot kisses upon her sweet quivering lips.

And then upon his heart she poured forth all the story of her wasted life, all the love she had given to him long ago, all the miserable despair that had driven her to marry Cis, all the honest struggles, the hard

warfare that she had waged ever since with her own heart. All the story of her husband's falseness and duplicity, his coldness to her, his contemptible weakness, his powerlessness to ensure even her regard and esteem —she told it all, the long pent-up misery of a lifetime, in broken sobbing words, clasped upon his heart, and then came again the wail.

‘ What have I left—what have I to live for, if you leave me? Oh Hugh! take me with you, take me with you ! ’

In the moments of silence that succeeded her passionate words—words in which all pride, all shame, all self-consciousness, every lesser feeling was merged in the one great love that, through all its sinfulness, had yet something almost divine in its utter self-devotion, like the impress of a master’s chisel on the ruined temples of antiquity—in those few

moments, when the beating of their own hearts seemed to sound in the ears of those two louder than the soft sighing of the wind in the branches above them, than the subdued slush of the river against its banks at their feet—in those moments God knows what reckless agony of despair was not in the heart of the woman, what fierce heat of soul-consuming temptation in that of the man.

And then he spoke, brokenly, tremblingly at first, but more steadily, more clearly as he went on.

‘Dearest,’ and his hand tenderly strayed over the soft dark head that lay on his bosom, ‘I do not think I ever loved you so well as at this moment. Do you remember in the old days how once before you offered your sweet self to me, love? and how I left you then because honour bade me?—fatal error, that I have ever since regretted, and never

more bitterly than at this moment ! Then was myself that I considered ; I was afraid of being thought to have taken an unfair advantage over you, to have sought your money, to have wooed you as the heiress and not as the woman. If such scruples were strong enough to make me leave you then—leave you as, before God I believed, to forget me shortly in a more suitable marriage with another—do you not think I have ten thousand times stronger reasons for leaving you now—now that it is not my honour, but yours that is at stake ? can your dishonour, your disgrace, bring happiness to either of us ? Darling, I love you too well to take you at your word !'

' You despise me ! ' she sobbed, moving uneasily in his arms.

' Not so, love. Can a man, worthy of the name of man, ever do otherwise than honour the woman whose only sin is that of

loving him too well ? To me you must ever be the same—it is of the world's slanders that I was speaking—you do not know how cruel and how blighting they can be, my child. You think you would not feel them ; but, believe me, I should feel them for you. My Juliet, my darling ! second, but dearest and strongest, love of my life, that no other woman can ever displace from my heart whilst I live—by your own dear words you have placed yourself and your life in my hands. Well, then, I will dispose of it. I give it you back, as the most precious gift I can offer you ! I tell you that, lonely and miserable as it is, it is still better and holier than the life you would spend with me—that there are duties still left for you, in the patient fulfilment of which you may still find—if not happiness, at least peace.'

He ceased speaking. Juliet's cheek, wet

with tears, was pressed against his arm in silence.

Across the river, the lights on the opposite bank gleamed out in the darkness, and flung long streaks of broken red flame across the water. A bird awakened, perhaps by the sound of their voices, twittered for a moment in the branches above them. A gust of distant laughter came up from the great white club-house behind them, so faint, so distant, that its merriment scarcely jarred upon them. All his life long, Hugh could see that scene before his eyes, and hear those sounds in his ears.

‘Hugh, I cannot—I cannot leave off loving you,’ she said, raising her heavy eyes, glistening with tears, to his.

‘God forbid that you should,’ he answered. ‘I do not think the impossible is ever expected of us in this world—to tell

you to do that would be to tell you to work miracles. Why should you not love me, my poor child? You have nothing else to love! Away with those who would see a sin in love! Love is divine—intense, honest love, however mistaken, however unfortunate the circumstances of it may be, must for ever be ennobling to him who loves and to him who is loved. Love me, my child, as I shall love you; but, darling, we may not meet—not again in this world, if we can help it. I will keep out of your way even if I ever come back from India again; and for the present, for many years probably, there will be half the earth between us; and I will write to you often. We may at least be friends, dear friends, since we must be nothing more.'

'You will write!' she said, in a brighter voice—'that will comfort me; and I may write to you?'

‘ Yes, indeed, I shall look for your letters—letters that, I trust, will not tell me of a thoroughly empty and wasted existence—that will not be filled from January to December with nothing but the doings of fashionable life ; of the sayings of such women as Mrs. Dalmaine ; of such men as Lord George Mannersley. Your heart is too noble, your mind is too refined, my Juliet, to waste on such companions as these. Go down to Sotherne again whether your husband go with you or not ; live on your own land and among your own people ; and then see whether life has not left you much to occupy and to interest you. It grieves me to think that Sotherne has been so long neglected by your father’s daughter—dear Sotherne ! Will it make you like to be there oftener, Juliet, if I tell you that I love the place, that when I am far away it will make me a little happier to think of

you there than here? For my sake, if for nothing else, will you make it your home again ?'

' I will do everything you tell me,' she answered humbly, looking up at him.

He was not looking at her ; his eyes were turned away across the shadowy river, and a gleam of moonlight lit up his strong brave face, that was neither beautiful nor young ; yet out of his deep-set thoughtful eyes there shone the steadfast light of the great true heart within him, giving it a beauty of the soul which is lacking in many a more regularly chiselled countenance.

At that moment Juliet felt she hardly could pity herself and her lot. It was so good, she felt, to be so loved and so cared for by such a man. It was something to have lived for, to have won such a heart as his ! And if, indeed, as he told her, they

must never meet again in this world, surely the memory of this night alone must console her for ever for the blank years that were to succeed it.

‘ You are so good to me ! ’ she whispered.

He looked down at her with one of those quick tender smiles which seemed to come into his face like a flash of sunlight for Juliet alone.

But the sight of her white face of misery, of her dark upturned eyes, wet with unshed tears, and solemn in their unspeakable woe, seemed almost too much for him. The smile faded from his face, and his lip trembled.

‘ Say good-bye to me, my darling,’ he whispered hurriedly. Once more their lips met in a kiss wherein there was no longer any joy nor any passion, but only the blank despair of an eternal farewell. ‘ God help you, my child,’ he said, and turned from her

suddenly, and left her standing there, a dark, silent, motionless figure, alone by the white swift river.

Not looking after him, she stood there listening—listening with every faculty within her—to the sound of his footsteps as they gradually died away upon the gravel path. Fainter and fainter they came to her ears, till at last a total silence succeeded to their irregular sound. It was the last of Hugh Fleming! So had he passed away from her for ever. Thus was the tragedy of her life played out!

With a long, shivering sigh, Juliet turned and walked a few steps in the opposite direction ; then stopped again, feeling strangely weak and feeble, and, leaning against the trunk of a tree, looked out again across the river.

As she stood there, a boat dropped noise-

lessly down the stream, close in to the shore. A man was rowing, a boy stood up in the front of the boat, and in the stern was a woman muffled up in a shawl, crouched down with her head bent forward upon her knees, her face buried in her hands.

Afterwards Juliet recollect ed noticing this silent boat-load, and speculating with something like a keen interest upon what was the history of this little family, whose faces she could not see, and whose forms alone stood out in ‘chiara oscura’ against the white background of the water. Whence did they come? Whither were they bound? What sorrow had bowed down that poor woman into that attitude of dejected grief?

‘God help her, whatever her trouble may be, poor soul! ’ murmured Juliet half aloud, as the boat passed out of sight round a bend

of the river. And who knows whether that short prayer from the woman who knew her not, yet felt for her with that keen sense of human fellowship with suffering, which sometimes, with a flash of God-like pity, seems to sweep away all distinction of class and caste, and to make us one with the beggar in the street—who can say that that prayer was not indeed heard and answered to that other sorrow-laden woman, who did not even see the dark pitying figure of her who prayed for her upon the river bank as she passed by!

In those first moments, Juliet hardly realised her own trouble. She could not have shed a single tear. If you had asked her the most trivial question, she would have answered you in her usual voice, as if nothing had happened. A numb feelingless apathy was upon her ; she could not even fix her

thoughts upon what had passed. She wondered vaguely if she was heartless, if she had turned into stone, if she had lost all power of sorrowing !

‘He is gone !’ she kept on repeating to herself. ‘I shall never see him in this world again ; never hear his voice ; never see him smile ; never, never as long as I live !’ And yet the words seemed like so many meaningless empty sounds to her as she uttered them.

All at once the voices of her every day life broke in upon her. Some of the gay party amongst whom she had sat at dinner-time—ah, how long ago it seemed now ! and what a lifetime she had lived through since she had last seen their faces!—came laughing and chatting along the river-walk, talking about some of the hundred little topics of daily life, about the bets upon the

last week's cricket-match, the plans for next week's gaieties, the prospects and arrangements for Goodwood. Juliet shrank closer under the shadow of the tree against which she leant, until the talkers had gone by. Everything was going on just as usual, the world was hurrying on gay and careless from one bright scene of enjoyment to another ; and she herself—ah, God ! how utterly alone in it she was !

With a sudden pang of suffering she roused herself, and walked hastily back to the house. She found Flora and Captain Hartley lingering together among the rose-beds.

‘ It is getting late, Flora ; we had better go home. Do you think my carriage is here ? Captain Hartley, will you kindly go and enquire for it ? ’

‘ Are you tired, Juliet ? ’ asked Flora, in

a sort of dreamy voice, as Jack Hartley hurried off.

'Yes, dear, very tired; I have a headache. Has anyone of our party gone yet?'

'No, I think not; but all those other men have left who were dining in the next room.'

'Ah!' and she drew a long breath.
Then he was gone!

'You are not half clad, Flora, in that thin muslin dress. Come, child, fetch your cloak, and let us go.'

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTAIN HARTLEY RETIRES GRACEFULLY.

SOMEBODY tapped at Mrs. Travers's bedroom door at about eleven o'clock the following morning.

'May I come in, Juliet?' said Flora, half opening it. 'Is your headache better?'

Juliet lay on the sofa wrapped in a white dressing-gown, her dark hair fell in thick masses on the cushions behind her head, and her face was as white as marble. There were heavy circles round her lustreless eyes, which made them look as if they had been open all the night. Her appearance was sufficient to have attracted notice to her wan

and miserable face, but Flora did not seem conscious of it. Something else was on the girl's mind.

'I have come to tell you something—a piece of news,' she said, standing a little behind her sister-in-law, so that her face was hidden from her.

'Well, what is it?' said Juliet listlessly.

'Juliet, Captain Hartley proposed to me last night, and I accepted him.'

And then Juliet set bolt upright on the sofa and looked at her.

Flora hung her head; there was none of the exultant joy, none of the shy gladness of a girl who has won a longed-for lover, in her face,—only white cheeks and heavy eyelids that were swollen with tears and sleeplessness.

'Accepted Jack Hartley, Flora!' cried Juliet. 'Why you don't care for him any

more than I do. What can have possessed you ?'

' I have accepted him,' repeated Flora, with a certain doggedness, and looking away from her sister-in-law out of the window.

And then Juliet got up and stood in front of the girl, and taking both her hands in hers, forced her to look into her face.

' Flora, my dear,' she said gently, ' you have got yourself into a great scrape, for you know very well that you care for Wattie Ellison and for no one else.'

' You have no right to say that, Juliet,' she cried impatiently, her eyes filling with sudden tears; ' that is all at an end. I have promised to marry Jack, and I must abide by my word.'

' You shall do nothing of the sort,' cried Juliet passionately. All at once she seemed to see in herself almost a divine mission to

save this young, ignorant girl from the consequences of her own folly. In the old days no one had put out a hand to save her from a loveless marriage, but it should not be her fault if Flora fell into the same fatal error that had shadowed her own life. Here was a duty and an occupation even such as Hugh had told her she would find in her life, something to do at once for another that should leave her no time for vain and selfish repinings over her own fate.

‘Listen to me, Flora,’ she said in a voice that was solemn from the earnestness of her meaning, ‘never, if I can prevent it, shall you be guilty of the sin of marrying one man whilst your heart belongs to another.’

‘Sin, Juliet !’ faltered Flora.

‘Yes, for sin it is, and nothing less. Do you not know, child, that a wedding-gown and a gold ring and a few spoken words

have no possible power to change the heart ? Girls seem to think that with their wedding-day everything is altered and swept away,— that their present life is ended, and a new self ushered in that will remember no more, nor feel nor think any longer the feelings or the thoughts of old. I tell you, Flora, it is not so. The man that you love to-day, you will love after you are married to another, possibly all the more intensely, because he is so hopelessly beyond your reach ; the thoughts, the hopes, the longings that belong to Wattie Ellison to-day, will be his on the morrow of your wedding, though a triple wedding-ring and thrice-told vows were to bind you to Jack Hartley. If girls thought of this oftener, there would be fewer unhappy marriages in the world. Quarrel with your Wattie if you like and die an old maid—you will be ten thousand times happier so than if you be-

come that most wretched and miserable of God's creatures, a loveless wife.'

The earnestness of her words impressed the girl with a sort of terror—Flora was trembling in every limb. 'What shall I do?' she cried clasping her hands together despairingly. 'You see, I have promised—how can I possibly get out of it now?'

'Did Captain Hartley say anything about calling here to-day?'

'Yes, he was to come about half-past twelve this morning to see me. I don't know how to meet him, I'm so miserable!'

Juliet glanced at the clock.

'Very well, Flora, if you will do exactly as I tell you and leave everything to me, I will see if I can get you out of this trouble.'

'How good you are!' cried Flora, and she flung her arms round Juliet's neck, and, amid floods of tears, confessed many things

to her about her foolish infatuation for Jack Hartley's handsome face which had made her behave so badly to Wattie—and how she loved Wattie with her whole heart and soul, but was afraid he was too angry and disgusted with her heartless flirting ever to forgive her or to care for her again.

' You are a very naughty silly girl,' said Juliet to her; ' but I am determined that you shall not be a wicked one as well. Now you must do exactly as I tell you. Go and put on your bonnet, and tell William to call you a cab. You are to go straight to Mrs. Dalmaine, and tell her I have sent you to lunch with her, and you can take her those dress patterns, and talk about that new dress I promised you, and stay there till I call for you this afternoon in the carriage. If she is going out you can still sit quietly there till I come for you, but you must promise me not

to come away from her house till I fetch you.'

'I will do anything you tell me, Juliet,' answered the girl meekly and gratefully.

So it came to pass that when Captain Hartley was ushered half an hour later into the cool flower-scented drawing-room in Grosvenor Street, he found sitting there, not his pretty grey-eyed, fair-headed *fiancée*, but her handsome sister-in-law, calm and self-possessed as usual outwardly, but inwardly awaiting the interview with no little trepidation.

Now, to say the truth, Jack Hartley had been all the morning in a very disturbed and uncomfortable frame of mind, and had been ever since a very early hour reflecting with some dismay and a very bad headache on his last night's after-dinner escapade.

To say that he had been drunk overnight

would perhaps be rather overstating the facts—but he certainly had taken rather more champagne than was usual to him, and, as he grimly reflected, it had been beastly sweet stuff, and had flown to his head in an unaccountable manner.

He certainly admired, and even liked Flora Travers very much indeed. He had sat next her at dinner, and had wandered about among the rose-beds in the darkened garden with her afterwards. The night air had been soft and balmy, the night odours had been sweet and soul-entrancing ; there had been no listeners save the grasshoppers and the night moths with folded wings among the flower-beds, and no lookers-on save the silver stars and one jewel-eyed frog upon the gravel path, staring at them with all his might and main.

Given all these fortuitous circumstances,

and a young man and a maiden wandering about alone together in a shadowy garden, and given that the young man is of a sentimental and impressionable turn of mind, and has taken rather more than is good for him, and that the maiden is fair to look upon ; that her slight, white-robed figure gleams out with graceful distinctness in the darkness, that her eyes shine upon him in the starlight with a softness which no gas-burners have ever imparted to them before, given all this, and you can have but one inevitable result—love-making. It may be only a little sham manufacture—a pretty make-believe on both sides ; or it may be that, carried away by a temporary exaltation, the love assumes a more serious aspect, and is made in real sober earnest ; but in some shape or other you may be very sure that love-making will go on.

Now, Jack Hartley had been so carried

away into making much more serious love than he had any idea of.

When he drove down to that Hurlingham dinner he had no more intention of proposing to pretty Flora Travers than he had of eloping with his grandmother. So that when he awoke the following morning, and realised that he had not only proposed to her, but had also been accepted, he was, to say the least of it, very much disturbed.

Not that he in any way objected to the little spoilt beauty. She was charming, a dear little girl, a prize any man might be proud of; but our friend Jack was not exactly in a position for marrying anything but an heiress, with five thousand a year.

His own income was small, and his debts were alarmingly large, and had a way of increasing weekly and yearly with a fearful steadiness and regularity; and Jack knew

very well that Flora was no heiress, and that with no money of hers could that long list of debts be paid off.

Nevertheless, Jack Hartley was a gentleman, and no idea of not keeping to his bargain entered for one moment into his head.

As he pulled on his boots, and rang the bell for his shaving water, he cursed himself for a fool to have been carried away by a pair of grey eyes and a soft little white hand, and all the witchery of a midsummer night, into doing so very mad a deed as he had been guilty of the evening before ; but all the same, he sent for a button-hole flower, and took very particular pains with his dress and general appearance, and started off with eager punctuality for his interview with the girl who had promised to become his wife.

‘I called to see Miss Travers,’ he said, when he had shaken hands with Juliet.

‘Yes, I know, Captain Hartley,’ she answered, ‘but Flora has gone out to lunch.’

‘Gone out!’ he repeated, in astonishment.

‘Yes, I have sent her out; and, if you will not mind, Captain Hartley, I want to have a little talk to you myself.’

‘Oh, certainly, Mrs. Travers;’ but, man like, as soon as he scented opposition, he began to make up his mind to stick to Flora with all his might.

‘Do you know, Captain Hartley,’ began Juliet, rather nervously, fidgeting with the trimmings of her dress as she spoke, ‘I am afraid this is rather a foolish business altogether between you and Flora.’

‘How foolish?’ he asked, a little stiffly.

‘Well, I need not tell you that a

marriage between you would be utterly out of the question. I do not think that, from all I have heard, you are in a position to support a wife at all ; and Flora would have nothing but what her father might allow her—which would not be much, were she to marry you—as I am sure he would most strongly object to it. And—forgive me if I appear impertinent—but it is said that you have extravagant habits, and are very much in debt—is it not so ? Of course her father would expect you to relinquish the one and to clear yourself from the other—may I ask how you would propose doing so ?'

Jack Hartley was silent. He sat forward on his chair, and twisted his hat about in his hands, and looked rather sulky.

' Flora has been entrusted to my care,' continued Juliet, 'and I consider myself answerable to her parents for any imprudence

she may be led into whilst staying with me ; so you must forgive my speaking to you so openly upon this subject. Captain Hartley, excuse me for telling you that I don't believe that you are prepared to alter your whole style of living for Flora's sake, neither do I think that she is the sort of girl who would be happy as a poor man's wife.'

' How can I propose to a girl one evening and give her up the next morning ? ' said Jack, surlily ; ' how can you expect me to do such a blackguard thing ? At all events, let me plead my cause, such as it is, to her parents.'

' That is precisely what I want to avoid ; at present, no one knows anything about it but you two and myself—let us all three settle that it is a foolish and impossible idea, and there need be nothing more said about it.'

'But Flora herself will not consent to give me up, Mrs. Travers: and if the dear little girl is willing to stick to me, by George, I will stick to her!'

'Flora,' answered Juliet, with a smile—for she had no intention of lowering her sister-in-law's dignity, nor of wounding Captain Hartley's feelings, by revealing to him that Flora was not in the least in love with him, and had only accepted him from pique with another man,—'Flora is, I am happy to say, too sensible to wish to carry on an engagement which she knows can never result in marriage, and which can only bring trouble to you both. I have had a long talk with her this morning, and she has decided to be guided by me entirely; and if you will consent to look upon your last night's words to her as a piece of folly on both sides which had better be forgotten

as soon as possible, she has commissioned me to tell you that she will do the same, as she is sure that it will be better for your happiness to forget her.'

' You mean to say that she wants to break it off, then ? '

' Yes, I think she does ; and fortunately you have not known each other long enough for it to be more than a transient pang to either of you. I shall send Flora home in a few days ; and if you do not meet her till next season, you will probably have quite got over any little awkwardness by that time, and be very thankful to me for having spared you the misery of a marriage on a very small and inadequate income.'

Jack Hartley began pacing up and down the room. It was really a wonderful piece of luck to have the thing so comfortably taken out of his hands, and to have the way to an

honourable retreat so comfortably opened to him. Of course the idea of marriage with a penniless girl was madness—it couldn't be thought of; he ought to be too thankful to anyone who saved him from the misery of a comfortless lodging, a badly dressed wife, possible babies, ill-cooked dinners, cheap cigars, and a maid-of-all-work. Even a passing thought of these things made him shudder with horror and disgust. Mrs. Travers was quite right; he was not sufficiently in love with Flora to be able even to contemplate with equanimity such an utter revolution in his life for her sake; he had better by all means resign her at once, and be satisfied that he had done all an honourable man could be expected to do to fulfil the rash engagement he had so foolishly entered into; he had been perfectly ready to fulfil his part of the contract, and if she and her relations

had seen fit to draw back, why he ought to thank his stars for getting off so easily, and be perfectly content.

Perfectly content, of course.

And yet there was a hankering at his heart for another sight of the grey eyes, and the small fair head, and the saucy red lips that somehow, now that they were to be taken away from him, seemed to become more precious in his sight than they had ever appeared before.

‘I suppose I might not see her again—just to wish her good-bye?’ he said, rather piteously, stopping in his uneasy walk about the room in front of Juliet’s chair, whilst a vision of one more kiss from those sweet lips floated temptingly before his imagination.

‘Certainly not,’ answered Juliet, and she could not help laughing, for she pictured to herself at once how Flora would weep and

deplore her wickedness, and probably confess the whole truth about Wattie in her self-reproaches, and so break down the whole course of her own strong line of argument. ‘Certainly not; no possible good could come of it, and it would be only a very painful ordeal for her.’

‘Well, I dare say you are right,’ said Captain Hartley ruefully. ‘Will you tell her I am sorry—I spoke rashly to her; I ought, of course, to have considered everything—and I wouldn’t drag her down to a wretchedly poor marriage for the world. I shall always be fond of her, and grateful to her for being willing to have me—but it is better not; and now I think I will go, Mrs. Travers.’

So, with a tremble of real emotion in his broken words such as he had hardly believed himself capable of feeling for little

Flora Travers, Captain Hartley took his leave, walked somewhat unsteadily down Grosvenor Street, owing to an unusual dimness before his eyes, then turned into Bond Street, where he encountered a friend, into whose arm he linked his own, and by the time he had reached his club in Pall Mall had, under the influence of congenial society and a good cigar, completely recovered his equanimity and his usual good spirits.

Wattie Ellison was hard at work at his chambers in the Temple. There was no painting litter, no easels with half-finished pictures upon them to be seen about the room now, as in the old days when he had aspired to be a Royal Academician, and had copied Gretchen Rudenbach's gentle face as a study for his 'Joan of Arc.' Somewhere or other up in a lumber room, behind several dusty

portmanteaus, and a pile of very much dustier law papers, that same canvas was leaning with its face to the wall, just as it had been left on the morning of Georgie Travers's death—with the figure of Joan of Arc drawn in, and Gretchen Rudenbach's face fairly finished, shining like the head of a saint out of the blank canvas, whilst a confused mass of black chalk scratches all round it served dimly to shadow forth the howling, raving multitude that were to have been seen struggling and fighting below her scaffold.

Long ago had Wattie Ellison done with such idle fancies of a short cut to fame and fortune. His table nowadays is covered with briefs, his clerk looks in every now and then to receive orders and directions, and his face looks very stern and aged since the days when he was poor Georgie's penniless lover, who rode his uncle's horses, and had much

ado to keep himself in boots and breeches through the hunting season.

Presently the clerk comes in with a cup of coffee and a piece of dry toast on a tray, announcing it somewhat pompously as ‘your lunch, sir.’ Mr. Ellison answers, ‘All right, put it down,’ and goes on with his reading and taking notes until the coffee gets stone-cold, when he drinks it all off at a gulp, and munches the toast with his eyes still riveted upon the blue pages of the draft in his hand.

Little enough time has a rising young barrister, with a fast-spreading reputation for talent, for any such trivial occupation as luncheon!

Presently the clerk looks in again.

‘If you please, sir—’ he says with some hesitation, ‘there is a lady wishes to speak to you.’

‘Eh, what—a lady? Some begging

governess; I suppose. I can't possibly see her, Adams.'

'So I told her, sir,' said Adams doubtfully; 'but she seemed to think you would be sure to speak to her—and she is a lady, sir, and none of your begging-women.'

'Very well, go and ask her name.'

Presently Adams came in with Mrs. Travers's card between a very much ink-stained finger and thumb.

'Show her in at once.'

And Juliet enters.

'I am very sorry to disturb you, Wattie,' she said, when she had shaken hands with him, and had taken the chair he hastened to offer her. 'I won't detain you one moment; I only want to ask you if you will go down to Broadley next Sunday.'

'Why, is Mr. Travers ill?' he asked quickly.

‘Not at all, that I know of ; but the old man is always, as you know, glad to see you ; and, besides, Flora will be at home again,’ added Juliet, looking down demurely at the threadbare carpet below her feet.

‘I don’t see what that has to do with me,’ answered Wattie, with stern disapprobation of Flora and her movements in his voice.

‘Don’t you?’ cried Juliet, looking up at him suddenly in her impetuous way ; ‘then I will tell you—I think it has everything to do with you. I am a very old friend of yours, Wattie, so I am going to take the liberty of telling you that you are just throwing your happiness away ; and I can tell you that, if you won’t take the trouble to put out your hand to take her, somebody else will save you the trouble.’

‘If Flora prefers somebody else—’ began Wattie stiffly.

‘She does nothing of the sort,’ broke in Juliet angrily; ‘and the proof is that she is going back home to Broadley again as free as when she came to me; and I can tell you,’ she added with a free translation of the events that had happened which was thoroughly feminine, ‘that if she had chosen she might have gone home engaged to Captain Hartley, and that she is not, ought to be a proof to you, that, whatever little faults she may have, her heart at all events is in the right place.’

‘Do you mean to say that Hartley proposed to her?’ asked Wattie excitedly; for the idea of a rival is never pleasing to any man.

‘Certainly I do; and somebody else will probably do the same unless you look after her yourself. I have no patience with you, Wattie—letting a nice affectionate girl like

Flora slip through your fingers, just because you don't choose to take the trouble to speak to her.'

'It is not that, I assure you, Mrs. Travers,' began Wattie eagerly, and flushing a little as he spoke. 'I never meant to force Flora's affections—and I have fancied lately that she did not care for me except as an old friend. She has been cold in her manner to me, and has done several things which she knew I disapproved of, and which I had expressly asked her not to do. For instance, there was the day at Lord's—could anything prove more plainly to a man that a girl did not care for him than that?'

'Oh, what fools you men are!' cried Juliet; 'why, her coldness to you and disregard of your wishes was just what showed how much she was thinking of you ; and as to the cricket-match, why, she went in a dark-

blue bonnet which made her look almost plain, just because you are a Harrow man !'

' So she did ! ' exclaimed Wattie, remembering the fact for the first time. ' I did not notice it then.'

' Why, you were blind ! A more marked encouragemeut could not have been given to you. You men always seem to think a girl must throw herself into your arms before you can believe in her sincerity. Now, don't be a fool, my dear friend ; go down to Broadley next Sunday, and see if I am right or not about her affection for you.'

Wattie Ellison promised somewhat shamefacedly that he would go down to Broadley, and Juliet shook hands with him and took her leave.

From the Temple Mrs. Travers drove to Mrs. Dalmaine's house, where Flora was waiting impatiently for her.

‘ Well, Flora, I have settled it all for you,’ said Juliet, as the two drove off together. ‘ Captain Hartley has behaved very well, and acknowledges the wisdom of all I said to him. I have convinced him that an engagement with you would be the height of folly, as there would never be money enough for you to marry upon, and your father would never hear of it ; so it’s all at an end, and he has sent you a pretty message, and we are neither of us ever going to allude to the subject again ; he is not at all angry with you, and thinks you are quite right—and I don’t think he is very broken-hearted ; so let us never speak of it again.’

‘ Oh, Juliet, how can I ever prove my gratitude to you ? ’

‘ Why, by doing exactly as I tell you. I am sorry to put an end to your visit, my

dear, but I am going to send you home to-morrow.'

'Not really?—oh Juliet!'

'Yes, really, Flora. Believe me, after what has passed, it would be very awkward for you to meet Captain Hartley; besides, I have promised him that you shall go—it is only right and fair to him.'

Flora shed a few tears behind her veil. 'I have been very foolish and wrong, I know, Juliet dear,' she said: 'but losing the rest of the season seems a dreadful punishment.'

'Well, take your punishment patiently,' said Juliet, laughing, 'and then perhaps it will turn out better than you expect; and be thankful, you foolish child, that you are not punished much more severely than by missing a few balls and *fêtes*.'

But of that other interview with Wattie Ellison at the Temple, and of his proposed

visit to Broadley on the following Sunday, Juliet, like a true tactician, said not a single word.

They were passing down Bond Street, and stopped for a moment at one of the large jeweller's shops.

' You needn't get out, Flora ; I am only just going to ask if my bracelet is mended,' said Juliet, as she got out of the carriage.

She went into the shop. A gentleman stood with his back to her, leaning over the counter. It was her husband.

A shopman was holding up before him a very handsome diamond locket, for which he was apparently bargaining, whilst several others of the same kind lay spread out in their velvet cases on the counter.

' I don't think I can do better than have that one,' said Cis.

' Certainly, sir ; it is quite the handsomest

thing of the kind we have had for some time and I am sure would give satisfaction. Where shall I send it for you, sir ?'

'To Miss Rudenbach—120 Victoria Villas, Notting Hill,' answered Cis in a distinct voice, dictating the address to the man, who wrote it down.

'I will call again,' said Juliet, turning to the door, to the man who had come forward to her. 'I find I have forgotten something. I will call to-morrow.'

And she got herself out of the shop and into her carriage with the sort of bruised, giddy sensation one has after one has had a severe fall or a severe blow.

'Was the bracelet done?' said Flora.
'Why, how white you look, Juliet.'

'Home!' said Juliet to the footman, who was waiting for orders, and spoke not another word all the rest of the drive.

CHAPTER X.

A DIAMOND LOCKET AND A ROSEBUD.

GRETCHEN RUDENBACH sat in her pretty little drawing-room in Victoria Villas, with both elbows leaning on the table, her chin in her hands, and her eyes fixed on something in front of her. The something is a diamond-studded locket in a blue velvet case.

Don't be alarmed, gentle, virtuous-souled reader—there is no disgraceful episode, no shameful meaning, attached to this sparkling jewelled ornament. It is simply and solely a wedding present.

When Gretchen Rudenbach had written to Cis Travers and asked him to come and

see her, and had so prevented his accompanying his wife to her dinner at Hurlingham, it was that she really wished for his counsel and advice upon a very important subject.

The fact was that she had lately fallen in again with her old admirer, David Anderson—no longer the shambling, awkward, wild, red-bearded David of the old singing-class days in Blandford Street, but a sleek, well-mannered, well-to-do-looking David, inclined to be portly, and wearing irreproachable clothes—who bore upon his outer man the impress of the success of his life, and who had the grave and serious aspect of a moneyed Scotch merchant.

Mr. David Anderson stood now in his dead father's shoes, and was head partner of the hide and tallow business in Glasgow; and the younger Anderson, from his early experience and training in a good London

house of business, had made a much more profitable thing out of hide and tallow than ever his somewhat humdrum and old-fashioned father had done. Mr. David Anderson had his town house in Glasgow and his country house near Dunoon, on the banks of the Clyde, where his widowed mother kept house for him, and where he soon began to desire to instal a wife.

Then he bethought himself of his first love, the blue-eyed maiden with the German name, who had so snubbed and despised him in the old days.

It was not likely, thought our friend, with the serene self-satisfaction of a self-made wealthy man, and with, it must be owned, some knowledge of the weaknesses of the fair sex—it was not likely that she would scorn and despise him now—now that he had so important a name in the hide and tallow

business, and could offer her a rich and comfortable home, with any number of servants at her command, and handsome carriages to drive about in. A plain and ungainly wooer presents a very different appearance to the female mind when he is backed up by such arguments as these.

So David Anderson came up to London and hunted up his old love with some little difficulty and a praiseworthy perseverance, and made her, without more ado, a plain statement of his means, and an offer of his hand and fortune.

And then it was that Gretchen sent off for Cis Travers to ask his advice.

She could no more have helped turning to him in any crisis of her life than she could help, in spite of her judgment and reason, considering him the best and dearest of men.

There was about this little woman a

humility of gratitude, a dog-like fidelity which nothing could ever alter or change in her. She considered that she owed every success of her life to his boyish kindness to her, and she could never forget it.

So she sent for him, to advise her whether she should marry David, or whether she should reject him. And Cis Travers gave her pretty nearly the same advice that he had given her five years ago, when he used to walk with her to her music lessons in Bloomsbury Square. He told her that David was not half good enough for her, that he was rough and ungainly, that she would be throwing herself away upon him, and that she must not think of it.

Selfishly, as in the old days, though he could not marry her himself, he did not want anyone else to have her.

Gretchen, resenting inwardly every word

that he said, promised, nevertheless, to think it over for a day and a night before she decided. And when the day and the night were over, she wrote to him and told him that, in spite of his advice, she had determined that she would marry David, that he had much improved in every way, that she felt sure that he would make her happy, and that she did not think it would be right to refuse so very good an offer. And by the same post she wrote to David, and in a few simple, grateful words accepted him for her lover.

Cis Travers thereupon went out and bought her the diamond locket, and sent it to her with a letter so full of tragical reproaches and despairing reproofs to her for her cruelty to him, and broken-hearted prayers for her happiness, that even Gretchen could not help laughing at it as the most

absurd and extravagant letter from a married man to a woman who was nothing but his friend and his confidante, that could possibly have been penned.

And the locket gave her no pleasure. It was too handsome a gift under the circumstances, and Gretchen felt sure that her future husband would not approve of it.

She was still sitting puzzling over it when David Anderson came in.

‘Look here,’ she said to him; ‘Mr. Travers has just sent me this locket. I wish he had not—it is too handsome for me.’

‘I don’t know about being too handsome, my dear,’ answered her lover, looking at her proudly. ‘I could, and mean to, give you plenty of diamonds far handsomer than that, and I am sure they will be none too good for you; but that is too handsome a

present for Mr. Travers to give you—you are right there.'

Gretchen had instinctively crushed up the offensively exaggerated letter in her hand and slipped it into her pocket as Mr. Anderson entered. No occasion to make him jealous on the second day of her engagement to him!

'Well,' she said, standing up and shutting the case; 'I don't like taking it, for I feel sure his wife would not like his giving it to me;' and she blushed a little as she spoke.

'Very likely not, my dear. What do you mean to do about it?'

'Why, David, that is just what I was going to ask you—what would you advise me to do?' she asked, with a sweet deferential glance up at him.

‘Send it back to him, my dear,’ answered honest David.

‘That is just what I think I ought to do,’ she answered; ‘but how shall I do it? for he has been a very kind friend to me all my life, and I should be very sorry to offend him or hurt his feelings.’

‘Well, Gretchen, I should advise you to take it back yourself and give it to his wife; such a present should not go to any but a man’s own wife—let her have it and do what she likes with it.’

‘You are quite right, David, and I will follow your advice,’ cried Gretchen with alacrity. And she folded the case back in its papers, locked it up in her desk, and determined to carry it back to Grosvenor Street herself on the morrow.

It was Sunday afternoon, and Juliet was

sitting alone ; Mrs. Dalmaine had been lunching with her, but had left. Flora had gone home two days ago, and Cis had gone out by himself. All at once the door opened, and Miss Rudenbach was announced.

With everything within her kindling into an angry indignation at the name, Juliet rose from her chair to receive her visitor with well-bred surprise at the visit in her face.

Gretchen came forward, blushing and trembling, holding a white parcel in her hand.

‘ You will wonder at my calling on you, Mrs. Travers,’ she said nervously ; ‘ but I wanted to give you this—this parcel—it is a present which your husband——’

‘ Excuse me, Mademoiselle Rudenbach,’ interrupted Juliet, with haughty sternness ; ‘ if your business is with my husband, he is not at home ; and surely whatever you may

have to say to him cannot be fittingly said to his wife.'

'But no—' answered Gretchen, looking up at her with a calm surprise in her blue eyes; 'I do not want him; it is to you I wanted to speak. He is very kind—he has given me a present which is far too handsome, and which I cannot take—I do not want to offend him, so I have brought it back to you. See here for yourself how handsome it is—you will understand that I could not accept such a present.'

She opened the case in her hand, and held out the flashing diamonds towards her.

Mrs. Travers pushed it away from her without a glance; for had she not seen that locket before!

'Presents from my husband to you,' she said with an indignant flush, 'are not things

which you should dare to name to me
Keep your diamonds, Mademoiselle Ruden-
bach—I do not grudge them to you—but
spare me at least the insult of your presence
in my house.'

And then all at once it flashed upon
Gretchen what she meant, and what Cis
Travers's wife took her for. With a cry
of dismay she sprang towards her.

' Mrs. Travers! what can you mean?
What is it possible that you can have
thought of me? Your husband has been the
kindest of my friends for years—this locket
is his wedding present to me—I am going
to be married to Mr. Anderson.'

' Going to be married?' repeated Juliet
in astonishment.

' Yes. You have taken me for a dread-
fully wicked woman. Is it possible that he
has never told you of all his kindness to

me, when, without his help, I should have starved ? '

Juliet shook her head, feeling more and more bewildered. And then Gretchen sat down near her and told her the whole story of her life, and how Cis had helped her and been kind to her when she was alone and ill and penniless ; and how he had been her friend ever since.

She confessed to his wife with timid blushes how at one time she had perhaps thought a little too much about Cis for her own happiness, and how she had gone down to Sotherne to see him married, and had prayed fervent prayers for the happiness of both husband and wife from her hidden corner in the little country church.

But long ago, she said—even on that very day—had such foolish thoughts been banished from her heart, and Cis had been only

to her the dearest and truest friend that any lonely woman could wish for.

‘ I wish I had known all this long ago ! ’ said Juliet, with a sigh. And then with one of those generous impulses which were natural to her honest character she went up close to the little pianiste, and took hold of her hands and kissed her. ‘ Will you forgive me,’ she said, ‘ for having done you a grievous wrong in my heart? Yes, it is quite true that I had thought badly of you ; but I can never do so again. If Cis had told me about you long ago, I should have been glad and proud to have been your friend ; is it too late for me to become so now ? ’

‘ Dear Mrs. Travers ! ’ murmured Gretchen, overcome by the sudden kindness of her words.

‘ Look here,’ continued Juliet, taking up the velvet case from where she had dropped

it a few minutes ago scornfully on the table ; ‘ you will no longer refuse to accept this locket, will you, if I ask you to take it as a joint gift from myself as well as from Cecil, with all my most sincere good wishes for the happiness of your married life ? ’

And so Cecil Travers opened the door and found the two women sitting hand in hand together on the sofa, with the glittering diamond locket between them. No wonder that he stood still and stared at so unexpected a sight.

‘ I am congratulating Mademoiselle Rudenbach on her engagement,’ said Juliet, looking at her husband not without a spice of malicious delight at his evident confusion ; ‘ she has been showing me the locket you have given her, I have asked her to let me share in the gift as well as in the good wishes.’

And Cis could find no words wherein to answer her ; he could only shake hands with Gretchen in silence and look unutterably foolish and awkward.

After a few commonplace remarks relative to the weather, Gretchen wisely took her leave, and left the husband and wife together.

‘Cis,’ said Juliet, standing up close to her husband when they were alone,—‘Cis, what a pity it is that you did not tell me what a great friend you were of Miss Rudenbach’s long ago !’

‘Why should I have told you?’ he answered, looking both sheepish and surly, and turning half away from her.

‘Because you might have known me well enough to have been sure that, had you only dealt openly with me, I should not have been jealous, or have made myself disagree-

able to you about her. I should have been very glad to have known her better, for I think she is a charming young woman. But as it is, you have not dealt fairly by her, for your silence has made me do her and you a grievous injustice. Cis, I have suspected you wrongly, and I beg your pardon.'

'I am glad you are sorry for it,' he answered surlily. Cis had no perception of the generous candour which had prompted her to the avowal of her mistake ; he had no responding generosity to meet her half-way in her effort to make things straighter and better between them ; he could only revile her with a sort of conceited assumption of superiority which she could not but resent.

'If I was suspicious, it was your own doing,' she answered, with some show of temper. 'Why did you never speak the truth to me? There was no harm in it.

Why did you make a mystery of it, and tell me lies about it? Why Cis,' she added passionately, 'even if you had loved her, and had told me the truth; I could have forgiven you better!'

And then the small heart that there was in the man came up all on a sudden to the surface.

'*If I loved her!*' he said, with a sort of groan, and sank down into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

With a great pitying sympathy welling up in her own sinful, sorrowing heart, Juliet laid her hand upon her husband's bent head, and kissed his fair ruffled locks very tenderly.

'My poor Cis!' she said, with a great gentleness, 'we have made a dreadful mis take of our lives, haven't we? But somehow or other we have got to bear the conse-

quences of our errors together ; let us not make it harder to live out our lives together —for we have both of us much to bear with and to forgive in each other.'

So they kissed one another in silence, and Cis, feeling a little humbled and subdued, went away and left her.

For the first time in his life, some dim perception of the superiority of his wife's character to his own came vaguely over him.

He saw that there had been no feminine spitefulness, no littleness of soul, in her tender, tolerant words to him—she had not been shocked nor disgusted by his half-admission of his affection for Gretchen ; no torrent of angry reproaches had poured from her lips. On the contrary, she had seemed at once to understand and to sympathise with him, and to pity his trouble as one who had no thought for herself, but only of him.

For the first time it struck him that possibly she too had suffered, and that her life, as she had said, had been a mistake as well as his own.

He remembered, like a voice out of another life, how, long ago, she had told him that she had no heart to give him, and he wondered a little where and how that heart about which he had troubled himself so little had gone. He was, however, too selfish and indolent to disturb himself long about anything that did not concern his own personal comfort, and soon dismissed the subject from his thoughts.

But Juliet was the happier and the better for that little insight into her husband's heart, and for the forbearance and tenderness which it had called out in herself towards him. And so, although Hugh Fleming had already put the waters of the English Channel be-

tween himself and her, and she was to see him no more, a little of the blackness and darkness of the heavy clouds that encompassed her had even now been cleared away out of her daily life.

Meanwhile, on that same summer Sunday afternoon, another and very different scene was being acted out under the walnut-tree on the lawn at Broadley House.

An idyl ever graceful and ever new—‘the old, old story’ that never loses its charm nor its sweetness, however many times in this world’s history it is repeated—was being told over again under the fluttering branches of the tree which Flora had once in idle fancy likened to a cathedral aisle, and which became in very truth a shrine to her on this day.

The sunshine glinted down through the aromatic-scented walnut leaves upon her

drooping yellow head and sweet downcast face, and fluttered about the white draperies of her simple dress, as Wattie Ellison told her, in strong, manly words, the story of his deep love.

Divested of her fashionable London garments, of her crowd of admirers, of all the coquetry and unreality of her first season's experiences, Flora Travers seemed to have been transformed once again into the simple country maiden whom he had always known and loved ; nor had her six weeks of town life been altogether an unmixed evil to her, in that they had taught her to understand her own heart, and to value the sterling affection of the man who, not being blind to her faults, loved her in spite of them, more than all the flattery and adulation that had lately turned her head, but had not been able to spoil her heart.

And presently Wattie took the hand

which she had promised him upon his arm, and under the shady lime-tree avenue and out through the yellow cornfields, where the harvest was already beginning, they strolled slowly down to the churchyard in the valley, where scarlet geraniums, and mignonette, and great clusters of white clove carnations had turned poor Georgie's grave into a very wilderness of loveliness ; and there, standing up together hand in hand by the white cross round which a crimson rose had been twined by loving hands, Wattie Ellison told over again to her sister the short, sad story of his first love.

‘I am sure that she sees us this day, Flora, and that her blessing is upon us both,’ said Wattie, with his simple, childlike faith ; and then he stooped down, and Flora’s first present from her future husband was a rose-bud off her sister’s grave.

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF IT.

THE scene shifts, and we are at Sotherne again: Sotherne without its roses and with its great woods all stripped and bare, and with the winds and rain of December moaning dismally among its quaint twisted chimneys.

Yet, spite of the dreary autumn weather, Sotherne looks less dismal than it has done for many a day. There are fires in every room, and every window in the long gabled façade is unshuttered, and there are footsteps and voices along its passages from morning till night, for Sotherne's mistress has come back to live in it again.

The house in Grosvenor Street is let, and Mrs. Travers has allowed it to be understood that the home of her fathers is, for the future, to be her head-quarters : at which the neighbourhood generally rejoiced greatly.

A place like Sotherne is a dead loss to a county when it is shut up and uninhabited ; and even in Mrs. Blair's long and tranquil reign it was a useless house, as far as sociability is concerned.

But now that Mr. and Mrs. Travers have come to settle down there for the best part of the year, the whole population seems to have brightened and furbished itself up, in its delight to welcome them back. There have been more dinner-parties and dances given this autumn than have been remembered for many years, and great was the joy and excitement when it became known that, as soon as Christmas should be over, two entertain-

ments on a large scale would be held within Sotheorne's ancient walls—the first a juvenile dance and Christmas-tree, and the second a full-blown ball, to which 'everybody' was to be asked.

Cecil had consented to leave London and to return to Sotheorne more willingly than Juliet had thought it possible. For the first few weeks he amused himself at playing the country squire on his wife's property, but after a while he got tired of wandering about the fields with the head-keeper or the bailiff, and making ignorant remarks and suggestions, to which these gentlemen listened in silence, with a respectful smile, but which they did not dream of acting upon. As he had no country tastes or pursuits, he soon found the time hang heavily on his hands, and sat all day long in the library reading French novels or dozing idly in his chair.

‘Would you like to go up to town again, Cis?’ said his wife to him more than once; ‘I am sorry now we came to Sotherne,—you seem to find it so wearisome; would you like to go back?’

‘No; of what use would that be?’ he would answer fretfully. ‘I am not feeling well—I had just as soon be quiet.’

And something in his peevish answers and pale pinched face made Juliet a little uneasy on his account. There was surely something more than his usual fretfulness and listlessness upon him. Every other day he would go over to Broadley and sit with his father for an hour or so, and often, as she saw them together, Juliet thought that the old Squire—who still rode to hounds in a quiet way and tramped about his fields with his gun on his shoulder and his setter behind him to pick up a brace of pheasants or a

couple of rabbits, and who still took a lively interest in his *Field* and his *Sporting Gazette* —was by far the younger man of the two.

Something more than the despondency of a weak character was in the perpetual fretfulness and depression of spirits to which Cecil Travers had now become habitually subject. Sometimes Juliet thought his health must be breaking up altogether, and sometimes she even feared for his mind. Several times she entreated him to see a doctor; but Cis only shook her off impatiently, and refused to listen to her advice.

Once a week, indeed, Cecil seemed to brighten up a little at the arrival of the weekly letter, which, at Juliet's special request, Mrs. David Anderson never forgot to write to him; and the only thing to which he seemed to look forward with any degree of pleasure or animation was the prospect of

a visit from Gretchen and her husband, which they had promised to pay when the winter should be over.

Juliet was sitting one afternoon in the little morning room where so many of the scenes of her early life had been acted out. A foreign letter lay on the writing-table in front of her—a letter dated from the shores of the Lake of Como—sweet-scented with the pale double violets which had been enclosed in it, and breathing the fragrance of a thoroughly happy heart in every line.

Never, wrote Flora, were two people more suited to each other than she and her dear Wattie—their days were one succession of unbroken happiness—long days of sunshine and of peace, of wanderings side by side under the chestnut-trees, or of lazy, dreamy hours on the bosom of the blue lake. They were in no hurry to come home, a very

fairy-land indeed had the purple mountains and the calm waters of northern Italy become to them.

Juliet put down the letter with a happy smile. She had done some good there, she felt, and longed a little selfishly for the honeymoon days to be over, and for Wattie and his pretty bride to be at home again and within her reach, where the sight of their happiness might be a perpetual pleasure and interest to her.

Another letter lay beside her, from her stepmother—a letter written in a very different spirit.

Since Juliet had returned to live at Sotherne, she had taken herself, by so doing, completely out of the reach of Mrs. Lamp-lough's slanderous tongue. Living a quiet life alone with Cis at Sotherne, and Colonel Fleming gone back again to India, it would have been difficult for any female friend,

however spitefully inclined, to have spoken harmful words of her. Mrs. Lamplough deemed it wise to ignore all disagreeable and dangerous allusions, and to keep up a brisk correspondence, teeming with flattering words and exaggerated expressions of affection to her ‘dearest Juliet.’

In truth, the poor woman could not afford to lose Juliet’s friendship, for she was very far from contented with her lot.

Marriage with the Rev. Daniel Lamplough, whom she soon discovered to be a selfish and vulgar domestic tyrant, was anything but the bliss she had at one time expected it to be. Instead of being allowed to have her own way, to give entertainments, to dress fashionably, and to mix in ‘aristocratic circles,’ as had once been her dream, Mrs. Lamplough found herself a slave, bound hand and foot under a threefold tyranny.

Her husband, her sister-in-law, and her sour-visaged maid, seemed to vie with each other to thwart her in every trifle, and to make her life a perfect misery. She hardly knew which of these three personages she hated the most. She could not do the smallest thing, from altering the position of an arm-chair to dismissing a housemaid, or inviting a friend to dinner, without obtaining permission from one or other, and often from all of these three potentates : and her worldliness, and sinfulness, and general similitude to the children of the Devil was so often cast in her teeth, and bemoaned over by her persecutors, that she began to detest the very name of religion, and once had the boldness to tell her husband that if the children of Righteousness where all like him, she should infinitely prefer to belong to the family of Sin—a flaring piece of blasphemy, for which

she was practically sent to Coventry for more than a week, as her husband refused to speak to her, dined from Monday till Saturday at his club, because he said that he could not sit at meat with so hardened a sinner, groaned aloud when he met her about the house, and what was the worst penance of all, prayed specially at morning and evening family prayers, before all the servants, that the Almighty might be pleased to turn the heart of his dear, but sinful and erring wife.

A few months of such treatment were sufficient completely to alter and to subdue the unhappy woman ; her only pleasure now was in writing long, miserable letters to Juliet in which she poured out full descriptions of her woes and troubles, and bitter repentance for having ever married again, and often deep sorrow for all her past

offences and wrong dealings towards her stepdaughter. Her letters were a very jeremiad of misery, and Juliet, who was generous, although to the last she could never quite believe in anything she said, forgave her freely, and kept up the correspondence. She wrote to her this afternoon a long, cheerful, comforting letter, in which she tried to raise her spirits and make her look more hopefully at all the troubles and worries of her self-chosen life.

And then, as the short winter afternoon began to draw in, and it became almost too dark to see to write, she left the writing-table and went to sit down on a low seat in the window.

Outside, the wind howled and moaned dismally among the naked branches of the trees, the sky was heavy and lowering, the

dead leaves fluttered across the lawn in a melancholy way.

It grew darker and darker—one by one the more distant objects in the landscape faded away indistinctly into the greyness of the coming night, till at last only the twisted rose-bushes in the bed just outside the windows gleamed out of the dark background, lit up from the firelight within the room.

Back upon Juliet's memory came the vivid picture of just such another evening long ago, when the winter winds had so howled and moaned, and the dreary darkness had come on and left her sitting there staring out into it with hopeless, tearful eyes. She remembered how, on that other winter evening, there had come the sudden rush of a horse up the avenue and the clangling peal of the bell at the hall-door ; and then all had been hurry, and confusion, and dismay, till

poor Georgie had been brought into her house to die. Very vividly that deathbed came back to Juliet's mind to-day—the long, sad night-watch, the broken-hearted grief of the old Squire, the painful bustle of the arrival of Wattie and Cecil from town, and then the last scene of all, and the dying girl's last words, when she had extracted that fatal mistaken promise from herself, and clasped her hand into that of Cecil.

As Juliet thought it all over, slow, sad tears of sorrow for her dead friend, and of regret for her own wasted life, coursed one by one down upon her clasped hands.

With a shudder as of some premonition of evil, she knew not what, she rose from the window as old Higgs suddenly opened the door and stood before her.

‘What is it, Higgs?’ she asked, in the

very words in which she had asked it on that evening long ago.

‘Would you come into the library, ma’am?’ said the old butler, with rather a frightened face. ‘I don’t think that master can be well, for he never moved when I took the lamp in, nor answered me when I asked if he had any letters for the post.’

‘He was asleep,’ answered Juliet, with a strange flutter of terror at her heart as she hastened from the room.

They went into the library together—Juliet first, with her quick, impetuous step, and Higgs following her, trembling all over from head to foot.

Cecil sat upright in his arm-chair, with his back towards the door. A shaded reading lamp stood on the table in front of him, and flung a bright circle of light just around it, and ghostly shadows about the large room

and over its oaken furniture and heavy book-cases. His elbows were on the table in front of him, and his hands both put up shading his face, and before him lay an open writing-case and a half-finished letter upon it. When they came in he never turned in his chair, nor lifted his head, nor dropped his hands, nor moved one single hair's-breadth in his attitude.

'Cis, look up! speak to me!' cried Juliet with a sharp, ringing voice of horror, as she sprang towards him and touched his shoulder. And then she caught away his hands, and they were cold and stiff; and his face was white and altered, and his eyes were wide open and fixed—for in them was the solemn immovable stare of Death.

For Cecil Travers would never move or look up, nor ever more speak to her again!

.

Six months have come and gone, and summer is in the land again. It is six months since Cecil Travers was laid beside his sister in Sotherne churchyard—six months, during which the crops have been sown and sprung up, and well-nigh ripened, and the trees have budded and unfolded themselves into midsummer glory, and myriads of summer birds and insects have been ushered into life and happiness, and whole showers of roses have covered Sotherne's walls with a mantle of beauty.

In these six months Juliet Travers has recovered from the severe illness which the terrible shock of her husband's sudden death had brought upon her; and now reclines very pale and thin, in her deep crape and snowy widow's cap, on a low couch that has been wheeled out on to the lawn for her, under the elm-trees.

Juliet has mourned for Cecil truly and deeply—not with the mourning of a widow who has lost her supporter and her other self, but rather with the gentle grief of a mother over some sickly, wayward child, who has been to her more an occupation and a duty than a comfort or a pleasure.

But to all such mourning, when it does not wrench up the very roots and vitals of our hearts, when it does not alter our nature, nor throw an impenetrable gloom over our whole lives—to all such mourning, when it is sad but not bitter, there comes a natural end. And to Juliet's mourning that end had come; her illness—many days of unconscious delirium, many weeks of utter prostration and weakness too great for thinking—had placed a wide gulf, a blank of vacancy between herself and the past. A new life is now opening before her, and, with her

sense of freedom in the realisation of her widowhood, new hopes and new thoughts are beginning to stir within her.

She had called for her writing materials to be brought out to her on the low table beside her sofa, and is sitting now with a blank sheet of paper before her, her pen idle in her hand, and her eyes fixed with a not unhappy look in them upon the distant blue hills beyond the valley.

‘Shall I? dare I?’ she is saying over again to herself, whilst a little smile plays about her lips.

Then all on a sudden she pushes aside her writing materials, and rising, with a somewhat weak and trembling step, walks across the lawn into the house through the morning-room window.

And what do you suppose she does there, daughter of Eve as she is?

Why, first she carefully shuts the door, and then she moves away a sofa from before a long mirror that fills up one end of the room, and, with a blush that would not misbecome a maiden of nineteen, she takes off her widow's cap, and surveys her own fair image in the glass.

And fair it is, despite her eight-and-twenty years, and despite the saddened lines which suffering and sorrow have traced upon her face.

Her small, dark head, with its crown of polished plaits, is upheld as proudly as of old ; her glorious eyes are as deep and as tender—ay, and as full of fire ; the rich curve of her lips, the regular outline of her oval face, and her figure,—which, if it is a shade more matronly, is as perfect in its graceful curves,—are as full of subtle charm, as when she first greeted Hugh Fleming

standing out upon the doorstep of her home, and he had thought her the loveliest and fairest among English maidens.

Yes, she could acknowledge to herself without vanity that her beauty had not yet left her, that she was still lovely with a loveliness which, had it ever power to charm and to fascinate him, must do so still.

Then she pinned on the disfiguring cap, and went out and sat down again before her writing-case, and began to write rapidly and hastily, with a glad rosy flush coming and going upon her down-bent face.

‘ Why should we waste any more of our lives apart from each other? We have suffered too much and too long to care any longer for the empty conventionalities and the idle gossip of strangers who do not know what our life’s story has been. I am prepared very gladly to be called heartless and

disrespectful to poor Cecil's memory, and to be a nine days' wonder and scandal to my native county, if only by so doing I may but have you with me again. Dear Hugh ; come back to me, for truly I have hungered and thirsted for the sight of you, for too many weary days, to bear absence from you with anything like patience, now that nothing more need stand between us for ever. Our lives have been half wasted apart, let us not lose any more of the precious golden days which might be spent together. Darling, come back to me ; do not give me the bitter humiliation of being rejected by you for the third time !'

Nor does he.

Within a few months of the receipt of that letter, Hugh Fleming is in England again ; and when a year is over since Cecil has been carried to his grave, he goes down

to Sotherne one morning by the early train, and Juliet, and Mrs. Dawson, and Wattie, and Flora meet him in Sotherne church, just in their everyday clothes, only that Juliet has doffed her crape and wears a simple grey dress, plain as any nun's ; the old vicar stands in the chancel with his spectacles on his nose and his open prayer-book in his hand, and a few villagers drop in to look and to wonder ; and in this fashion these two, who have loved and suffered so long, are married at last to each other.

Of course, as she had prophesied, it was a nine days' scandal to the neighbourhood, who knew nothing of her life, but to Cecil's family she had told her story, and they forgave her, and were not offended with her for marrying the man she had loved for so long—and that was enough for Juliet.

Another distress to the county was that

Colonel and Mrs. Fleming did not go away for a wedding tour, like all other decent and respectable brides and bridegrooms, but that, shaking hands with the little wedding party at the church door, they walked off together arm-in-arm up the hill to the house, where they immediately took up their abode without any sort of outward rejoicing, and with no thought of going away even for a week.

One more glimpse of my heroine before we say good-bye to her.

She is standing on the lawn with her husband a few days after her marriage, and together they are watching a glowing golden winter sunset shedding its glory over the landscape below.

It is just such another evening as the one with which my story opened, only that, in place of the golden-hearted glow of October, it is now the paler but scarcely less lovely

light of the finest and warmest of February days.

Crocuses and snowdrops are springing up in the garden-beds around them, and black-birds and thrushes are awaking after their long winter silence to welcome the coming spring with a very concert of joy.

A new life dawns upon the earth. A new life too is opening for the husband and wife. Juliet, with a deep thankfulness in her sobered face, is looking out with solemnly glad eyes over the familiar scene, and Hugh is looking at her face.

‘Darling,’ he says, drawing her to him with a sudden flash of tenderness, ‘it is good to be together at last, is it not? We have suffered so much in the past——’

‘Ah, it is more than I deserve!’ she interrupts quickly, resting a soft rosy cheek against his own. ‘When I think of all the

wicked things I once said and thought, can I ever repent enough! We have suffered, Hugh—but I have also sinned!

‘Sweet sinner!’ he answers playfully, and lays his lips upon hers. ‘Where is the man living who would not forgive to so fair a penitent the sin that was sinned for love’s sake! ’

THE END.

March, 1877.



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